

LEONARDO DA VINCI'S GIOCONDA
AND THE YELLOW SHAWL

OBSERVATIONS ON FEMALE PORTRAITS
IN THE RENAISSANCE

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Dedicated to Almut Mutzenbecher

Abstract

Interest in Leonardo's *Gioconda* – *l'illustre incomprise* as André Chastel once described her – has ebbed and surged over the years. A high tide is just receding after the publication of a document in 2008 which appeared to settle the question of the sitter's identity once and for all: a handwritten note in an incunable, dated 1503, states that the artist has begun to paint a head of "Lise del Giocondo". For many scholars and certainly for a large public, she is now incontrovertibly the wife of a Florentine silk merchant. However, doubts remain and have been expressed by some experts, if only briefly.

In this study I propose to approach the identity of the *Gioconda* by determining first the social position of the person depicted. By presenting and interpreting distinctive sartorial element in images of females of Leonardo's time, we shall reach

firmer ground on which to proceed. The elements – foremost a shawl – are specifically prescribed in contemporary legal documents as is their color, multiple shades of yellow. The color connotations are informed by traditions going back to antiquity. The same holds true for certain facial traits and bodily poses of the individuals depicted; they are standardized features that deprive these paintings of the claim to be portraits in the accepted sense yet intentionally add tantalizing touches.

Confronted with portraits of known or anonymous Florentine housewives, the *Gioconda* does not conform to the succinctly prescribed norms of the genre. Her social group is, in fact, that of the courtesan, much studied lately with highly enlightening results that have not been applied to the extent that they could be.

Our observations are reinforced by a consideration of the word *Gioconda*, which has only recently been recognized in its true sense, again derived from antiquity: lady of pleasure. That connotation and contemporary evidence suggest that Leonardo was the author of a second version, a nude *Gioconda*, known only from multiple copies. In my view both versions were already undertaken before the painter left Milan in 1499.

With the frame of references in place, the question arises of whom Leonardo wished to present and what the painting – which he kept with him until shortly before his demise – may have meant to him. Our suggestion is tentative but is supported by the painter's own writings on the emotive, not to say erotic, power of his art which partly date back to the Milanese and second Florentine period.

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, a radical change of focus in the study and interpretation of female portraits of the Renaissance

has evolved, including aspects barely ever addressed before. Gender Studies and Reception Theory, to mention only two, clearly have furthered elucidation of the image's intent⁽¹⁾. Though many such portraits had been investigated before, the older studies lack the dimensions added by the multi-pronged approach of the new methodologies. The resulting literature is immense. Inevitably, this surge in deeply probing studies has led to a certain disregard of earlier research. Many unassailable conclusions now risk sinking into the quicksands of more fashionable propositions. One example must suffice, but it is intimately connected with the subject of this article.

Titian's grandiose portrait of the mistress of the twice widowed Alfonso I d'Este of Ferrara, a commoner who gave the duke two sons, has recently been the subject of long and learned studies (Fig. 1)⁽²⁾. The mistress' name, Laura Eustochia, may be

(1) For recent literature on female portraiture in the Renaissance see the splendid exhibition catalogue *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, A. Bayer (ed.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (New Haven / London, 2008); the essay of S. FERINO-PAGDEN, "Pictures of Women - Pictures of Love", *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, D.A. Brown et al. (eds.) (Washington, 2006), pp. 190-198; D.A. Brown (ed.), *Virtue and Beauty, Leonardo's 'Ginevra de' Benci' and Renaissance Portraits of Women* (Washington, 2001); L. CAMPBELL, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries* (New Haven and London, 1990). For a thoughtful assessment of constructive methodology in the field of art history see JOHN SHEARMAN, *Only Connect ... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Washington, 1992), Introduction, specifically p. 8.

(2) J. FAIR BESTOR, *Titian's portrait of Laura Eustochia: the decorum of female beauty and the motif of the black page*, "Renaissance Studies 17,4" (December 2003), pp. 628-673. ead., *Marriage and Succession in the House of Este: A Literary Perspective, Phaethon's Children: The Este Court and its Culture in Early Modern Ferrara*, D. Looney / D. Shemek (eds.) (Tempe, Arizona, 2005) pp. 49-83. See also J. WOODS-MARSDEN, *The Mistress as 'Virtuous': Titian's Portrait of Laura Dianti, Titian: Materiality, Likeness, Istorica*, J. Woods-Marsden (ed.) (Tournhout, 2007) pp. 53-69. For the painting (in the Heinz Kisters collection, Kreuzlingen) and its provenance see F. PEDROCCO, *Tiziano*



Fig. 1 – Titian, *Portrait of Laura Eustocbia Dianti*.
Heinz Kisters Collection, Kreuzlingen

an eloquent fabrication to conceal her humble origins since it seems to play on those of Petrarch's Laura and, perhaps, on the Roman lady Eustochium who followed St. Jerome to the Holy Land and was the addressee of a letter of his that emphasizes the importance of virginity. An impressive number of both biblical and patristic passages are assembled in Bestor's 2003 study to rebut the arguments in seventeenth century references to the portrait where, among other reasons, the sitter, because of her dress and deportment, is identified as a *donna lasciva*, that is a courtesan. The illegitimacy of the union with Alfonso, at least in the eyes of the papal administration of the post-Tridentine period, excluded her descendants from taking charge of the dukedom. A question imposes itself with regard to Laura's second name. Duke Alfonso, a ruler of great erudition, did not call his mistress Eustochium after the virgin devotee of the church father, as maintained in the articles under discussion, which would have shown a serious lack of taste on his part, but rather Eustochia. Now, the Greek word εὐστοχία means skill in shooting at a mark, a good aim, and, metaphorically, sagacity, shrewdness. These were most likely qualities the Duke appreciated in his concubine⁽³⁾.

(Milan, 2000) no. 72; when in the collection of the Emperor Rudolph II in Prague, it was inventoried in 1599 as a 'Turkish lady.' For the correct interpretation of the painting see HANS OST, TIZIANI SOGENANNTA 'VENUS VON URBINO' UND ANDERE BUHLERINNEN, "Festschrift für Eduard Trier zum 60. Geburtstag", J. Müller-Hofstede and W. Spies (eds.) (Berlin, 1981) pp.129-149, specifically pp. 136-138, with fig. 5, and reference to an earlier interpretation. This perceptive study has been lost sight of almost entirely. See also PAUL H.D. KAPLAN, *Isabella d'Este and black African women, Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (eds.) (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 125-154, fig. 35.

⁽³⁾ See LIDDELL & SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. 1940 (Oxford, reprint 1977), s.v. For documents and sources regarding Laura see G. RIGHINI, *Due donne nel destino di casa d'Este: Marchesella degli Adelardi, Laura Dianti*, "Deputazione Provinciale Ferrarese di Storia Patria", n.s. 28 (1964) pp.75-169; p. 83f.: "Laura ...laudata ... dagli scrittori estensi come 'intelligentissima e di

Our concern lies with three features in Titian's portrait of Laura which, with the greatest possible emphasis, indicated to her contemporaries – and for a long time after – the character of her background and status. It attests to Titian's supreme art that the formal integration of these features into the composition avoids any hint at the social stigma attached to Laura's station. The liaison of laymen as well as members of the clergy, both often of the highest rank, with such women, especially once the latter aspired to higher education and thus became *cortigiane oneste*, respectable companions, was a matter of course in the early 16th century⁽⁴⁾. What astonishes, however, is the widespread unfamiliarity of modern scholarship with the features in question although many published legal and literary sources have been available for centuries and were employed – more than once – by antiquaries, historians and art historians with informative results. Most prominent is the yellow shawl. The 'portrait' of woman in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, ascribed

bontá e umiltá grandissima.' Woods-Marsden (see n. 2) p. 53, assumes that the duke "gave her the new surname Eustochia, which coincided with that of a local Ferrarese family" [?] and emphasizes the likelihood of the connection with Eustochium "the virginal and youthful recipient of St. Jerome's letter on chastity, as this saint was very popular in Ferrara." Her n. 4 contains wrong references to Righini.

⁽⁴⁾ See e.g., E. R. KNAUER, *Portrait of a Lady? Some Reflections on Images of Prostitutes from the later Fifteenth Century*, "Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome", 47 (2002) pp. 95-117, with relevant literature, specifically p. 101f.; also I. WALTER / R. ZAPPERI, *Das Bildnis der Geliebten. Geschichten der Liebe von Petrarca bis Tizian* (Munich, 2007), specifically chapters 3-7. For similar cases in Germany see "... wir wollen der Liebe Raum geben": *Konkubinat geistlicher und weltlicher Fürsten um 1500*, A. Tacke (ed.) (Göttingen, 2006), see the review of the volume by CH. HECHT, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 90, 1, (2008) pp. 220-224, and KNAUER (see n. 4) pp. 106-109. For the intended ambiguity of artists and writers in their evaluation of the depiction or description of courtesans see U. ROMAN D'ELIA, *Niccolò Liburnio on the Boundaries of Portraiture in the Early Cinquecento*, "The Sixteenth Century Journal 33, 2", (Summer 2006) pp. 323-350.

to Jacometto Veneziano and dated to 1480-1490, attests to it, since the inscription on the back imitates a Greek epigram that clearly refers to the world of sensual pleasures (Fig. 2)⁽⁵⁾.

⁽⁵⁾ Inv. no. 243. Knauer (see n. 4), Figs 1 and 2 (the inscribed back of the panel), with relevant references. The much-used selection of original sources by D. CHAMBERS / B. PULLAN, WITH J. FLETCHER, *Venice: A documentary History* (Oxford, 1992) deals with legislation concerning prostitutes but omits documents which decree the wearing of a yellow shawl for the streetwalkers; this may have contributed to the widespread neglect of this conspicuous element. References to the requirements are missing in the recent studies of C. KOVESI KILLERBY, *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2002) and T. STOREY, *Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Cambridge, 2008). Brief hints are found in D. OWEN HUGHES, *Jews, Prostitutes, and the Body Social, "Italy in the Age of the Renaissance, 1300-1550"*, J. M. Najemy (ed.) (Oxford, 2004) pp. 110-123. The decrees, however, are amply covered by *Leggi e memorie venete sulla prostituzione fino alla caduta della Repubblica. A spese del conte do Oxford* (Venice, 1870-1872), a rare work. See also G. BISTORT, *Il Magistrato alle Pompe nella repubblica di Venezia*; G. TASSINI, *Cenni Storici e leggi circa il libertinaggio in Venezia dal secolo decimoquarto alla caduta della repubblica* (Venice, 1968), and *Il gioco dell'amore. Le cortigiane di Venezia dal trecento al settecento*, exhibition catalogue, Venice, Casino Municipale Ca' Vendramin Calergi, 2 February - 16 April 1990 (Milan, 1990). Two signal examples will attest to the symbolism of the color: CESARE RIPA, *Iconologia* (Padua, 1630) describes the image of FRAUDE (Deceit) as "a woman with two heads, one young and beautiful, the other old and ugly, she should be shown with bare breasts and wear a yellow dress etc.," and "During the trial of James I's favourite, The Earl of Somerset ... the wearing of yellow starch by the Countess of Somerset's confidante ... was widely taken as a sign of lust, debauchery and corruption throughout the court," see K. SHARPE in his review of A. Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction, Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England* (New Haven, 2005) in "Times Literary Supplement" (May 12, 2006), p. 24. The Church considered sodomy an even greater sin than prostitution and in Venice the death penalty was sometimes imposed on the perpetrators between the two columns on piazza San Marco: in 1480, the victim of a sodomite, clad in yellow, had to attend his execution, see Tassini, pp. 30f. It is worth noting the report in a much used German guide book on a painting of The Baptist, Herod and Herodias by Carlo Bononi (1569-1632) which was exhibited in a chapel of San Benedetto at Ferrara, the king and his wife were believed to be portraits of Duke Alfonso and his mistress Laura Eustochia, see J. J. VOLKMANN, *Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien etc.* vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1771), p. 487f.



Fig. 2 – Attributed to Jacometto Veneziano, *Portrait of a Lady*.
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Awareness of these sources is absent from Bestor's and Wood-Marsden's studies of Titian's portrait of Laura although detailed descriptions of the mandatory elements prostitutes were obliged to wear by sovereigns, city states, and the church, specifically the yellow scarf. The size and the fashion in which it was required to be worn varied – sometimes draped over the head but usually slung around the neck, covering one shoulder and fastened with a knot, occasionally one end of the material is pushed into the deep décolleté. Many regional differences are noticeable – the shawl could be of yellow gauze, of fine white or grey material edged with yellow or gold or striped with yellow. Numerous variations occurred over time, and the constantly repeated legal prescriptions by the authorities clearly indicate that the prostitutes attempted to circumvent this stigma ever afresh⁽⁶⁾.

The Connotations of Yellow

One aspect should be kept in mind: since antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages yellow was considered the color of

⁽⁶⁾ *Leggi e memorie* (see n. 5) p. 35, no. 14, a decree of 23 May 1421 states: “quos meretrices publicae que habitant per aliquas contractas Venetiarum, et similiter Rufiane, quando irent per civitatem Venetiarum deberent portare singula earum super vestem superiorem unum faziolum zalum circa collum ita et taliter quod apparet, et non est absconsum sub pena” etc. (“when the prostitutes who live in some segregated quarters of Venice as well as the procuresses go into the city of Venice, they must wear over their outer garments a yellow scarf slung around their necks in such a way that it is visible and not hidden, under penalty etc.”). *zalum* stands for *giallo* (yellow). For the first establishment of “a suitable residence for the female sinners” (postribulum), the castelletto on the Rialto, see *ibid.* p. 31, no. 6. It is interesting to observe the change in the designation of prostitutes from *peccatrices* (1358) to *meretrices* (1421 and 1490), *ibid.* p. 73, no. 66, to *meretrice over cortisana* (1530), *ibid.* pp. 101 f., no. 99. More references in KNAUER (see n. 4) pp. 98-101.

shame and yellow distinguishing marks were shared by both prostitutes and Jews⁽⁷⁾. Here I wish to add only two striking examples to the materials I have collected elsewhere. In an early eleventh century manuscript, the *Uta Codex*, written at the behest of Uta, abbess of the nunnery Niedermünster, at the neighboring church of Sankt Emmeram, both in Regensburg, there is a splendid illumination showing Christ exalted on the cross. Instead of

(7) KNAUER (see n. 4) p. 98, note 17, and p. 105, note 48; for Jews, p. 99, note 19. See also *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in the Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, M.B. Merback (ed.) (Leiden, 2008); D.E. KATZ, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia, 2008) with rich bibliography and documentation. For a Mantuan edict of 26 April 1496 stipulating that Jewish women wear a yellow veil and headcover, see p. 60, n. 61. Consequently, in the arts the figure of Judas in 'Last Suppers' or Synagoga often appear clad in yellow, however, this rich pit cannot be mined here. - Although classical sources refer to the color of the prostitutes' dress, (*luteum*) dirty yellow, (Plaut. Truc. 854, Persa 406), no mention of a dress code is made in recent studies of prostitution in antiquity. See, however, E. FORNACIARI, *Donne di piacere dell'antica Roma* (Milan, 1995), 'Vesti ed ornamenti', pp. 65-84. Rudolf Kassel generously adds to the literature (cited by Knauer, see note 4) which refers to the gaily-colored dress of Greek prostitutes, ἄσθινα, e.g., Phot. ε 2071 [*Photii Patriarchae Lexicon*, Ch. Theodoridis (ed.) (Berlin /New York, 1998) p. 199] = Suda ε 3276 [A. ADLER, *Suda Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1931) Pars II, p. 434: ἑταίρων ἀσθίνων νόμος Ἀθήνησι τὰς ἑταίρας ἄσθινα φορεῖν, (about the vari-colored clothes of the hetairai, the law in Athens [requires] the hetairai to wear vari-colored clothes); Kassel adds J.F. Kindstrand (ed.), *Bion of Borysthenes: A Collection of the Fragments with Introduction and Commentary* (Stockholm, 1976) p. 153 ad T(est.) 11, where the gaily colored garments of the hetairai are likened to a flowery literary style. See also H.G. LIDDELL / R. SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἄσθιον. - Remarkable discoveries were made at the excavation of a Roman bathhouse cum brothel of the fourth century A.D. in Ashkelon, Israel: in a sewer under the building the bones of hundreds of newborn infants were found, most of them boys, perhaps indicating that baby girls were allowed to live to be raised for the profession. Among the finds there were lamps with erotic subjects and the well-known motto: Eat, drink and be merry. For the survival of this often quoted epigram in the Renaissance see Knauer (see n. 4) pp. 104f. The reference to the Ashkelon excavation is owed to Xinru Liu, see *National Geographic*, no. 199 (January 2001) pp. 66-90, specifically pp. 85-87.

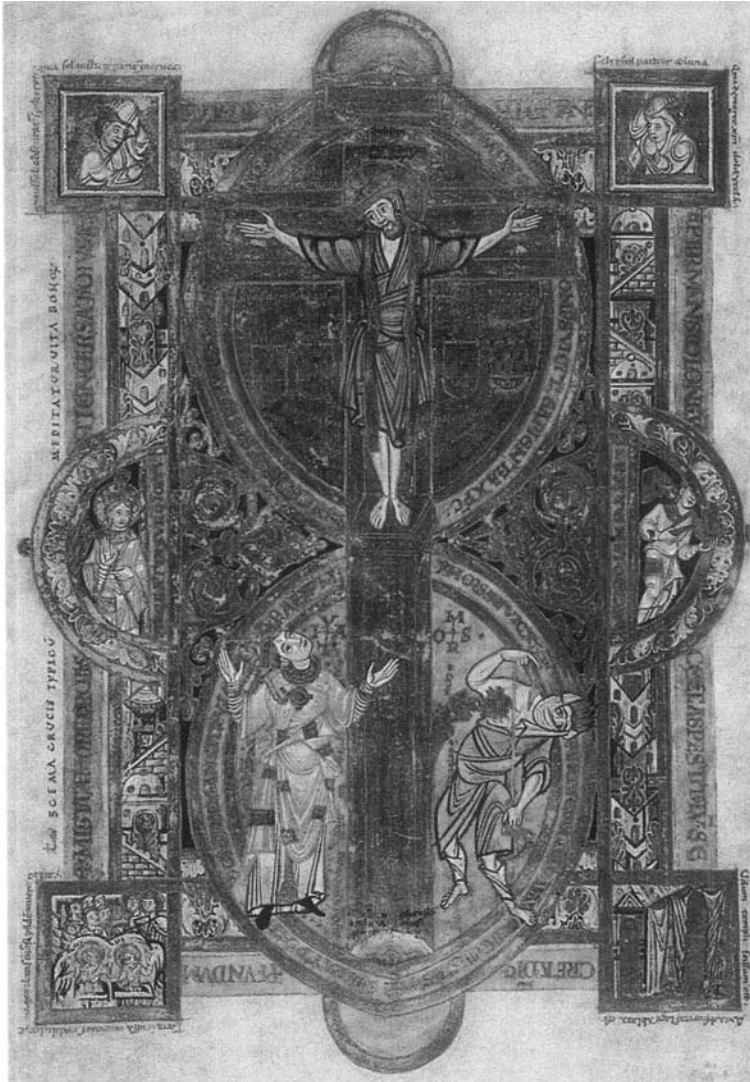


Fig. 3 – *Crucified Christ*,
Uta Codex, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Clm 13601, fol. 3v.

Mary and John, the exceptional figure of *Mors* is shown below the cross; it does not wear the expected white shroud but a yellow one indicating the negative connotation of the color (Fig. 3)⁽⁸⁾. The counterpart is *Vita* clad in a pink and purple cloak. *Vita* rejoices and looks up to the savior, *Mors* collapses dramatically.

The second example comes from a Strasbourg edition (1496) of Terence's comedy *Eunuchus* that features the 'good' prostitute, the *bona meretrix* Thais in the guise of a Venetian courtesan (Fig. 4)⁽⁹⁾. The colored woodcut shows her in a yellow gown worn over a red skirt, with long tresses (occasionally prescribed by the authorities as yet another mark of the streetwalkers) and a lengthy yellow shawl. Already by that time, the costume of the Venetian prostitute had apparently become a widely understood symbol of her profession⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Clm 13601, fol. 3v.; cf. A.S. COHEN, *The Uta Codex. Art, Philosophy and Reform in eleventh Century Germany* (University Park, 2000), pp. 56-58. No mention is made of the color of the shroud. But see W. WACKERNAGEL, *Die Farben- und Blumensprache des Mittelalters, Abhandlungen zur deutschen Altertumskunde und Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1872) pp.143-240; pp.186-190; 239 (his summary). *Mors* holds a lance and a sickle, both broken. In some later depictions, *Mors* is replaced by *Synagoga*, also clad in yellow and also with broken lance, her standard costume throughout the Middle Ages.

⁽⁹⁾ Color illustration in *Mirabile Dictu*. "The Bryn Mawr College Library Newsletter 2006-2007", on the page of the Table of Contents; from TERENCE, *Comoediae*. Strasbourg: Johann Gruninger, 1 Nov. 1496. A banderole provides her name: TAIS. Rudolf Kassel, with C. Austin editor of *Poetae Comici Graeci*, kindly informs me that Terence's model was a ἑταῖρα Chrysis in Menander's *Eunouchos* who was renamed Thais by Terence. Menander's Thais in the comedy of the same name was anything but pleasing. With his Chrysis, however, the Greek author had introduced into the cast of characters the beneficial ἑταῖρα.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A splendid example is Holbein's LAIS CORINTHIACA of 1526 in Basel, Inv. 322; the celebrated Greek courtesan wears a red velvet dress with ample yellow sleeves and a golden turban, gold coins are scattered on the stone parapet (Fig. 5). See *Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years 1515-1532*, with contributions by Ch. MÜLLER, *St. Kemperdink, et al.* (Munich / Berlin / London / New York, 2006) cat. no.114, fig.: p. 357. No mention is made of the color scheme. See also V. MAMEROW, *Hans Holbeins 'Lais von Korinth' und die*



Fig. 4 – *Thais*. Woodcut in Terence, *Comoediae*.
Strasbourg, Johann Gruninger, 1496

But back to Titian's Laura. She wears a luminous blue dress of somewhat unusual cut. The yellow shawl the painter drapes over her breast is one of the widest and brightest with which he ever endowed any of his 'beautiful women'. It also tries to disguise stylishly the startling fact that this majestic lady – who rests her hand on the shoulder of a black child in livery – has opened her white shirt in an alluring manner. This is another feature indicating with whom the viewer is confronted. Unlike the yellow shawl decreed by law and surely based on Titian's own observation, this detail is a telltale pictorial convention, not devised but made common by the painter himself. He was intimately familiar with the world of such women since he needed models for his mythological paintings and portraits of *belle donne* so much in demand at the courts of Europe. In a letter to Alfonso by the Duke's agent in Venice of October 14, 1522, the painter is reported as stating that he has access to nude prostitutes for his purposes in Venice apparently more readily than elsewhere⁽¹¹⁾. It is worth noting that Titian utilizes the signal ensign of the yellow shawl throughout his long career. Laura's

Anfänge des Kurtisanenporträts nördlich der Alpen, ...wir wollen der Liebe Raum geben" (see n. 4) pp. 422-470. Lais was a Corinthian τῶρα notorious for her high fees; a younger Corinthian Lais is said to have been the mistress of Apelles, Alexander's famous court painter. The ancient sources are confused (specifically Athenaeus' Deipnosophists 13, 570 b-d; the entire book is devoted to women and a rich source of erotica), see PAULY-WISSOWA, *Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 12.1 (Stuttgart, 1924) cols. 513-516: Lais (Geyer). Rudolf Kassel refers me to the more thorough study of both Lais the Elder and the Younger by K. HOLZINGER, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar zu Aristophanes' Plutos*, "Sitzungsberichte Wien 218, 3" (1940) 50-62, ad line 179. Kassel suggests that the name may have been taken from this verse since the *Plutus* was the most frequently read play of Aristophanes, heading the 'Byzantine Trias' (Plut., Nub., Ran.) in the manuscripts. The etymology of the word Lais has been connected with λαός = people, thus making her one who belongs to everyone.

⁽¹¹⁾ See G. GRONAU, *Alfonso d'Este und Tizian*, "Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien", n.s. 2, 1928, pp. 233-246, the text is on p. 246, B II; additional references: KNAUER (see n. 4) p. 101, note 32.



Fig. 5 – Hans Holbein, *Lais Corinthiaca*, Kunstmuseum Basel

portrait dates to the late 1520s, his *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* to the 1570s (Fig. 6)⁽¹²⁾. Significantly, Titian assigns it to both a lady of his days and a New Testament figure. Bestor's and Woods-Marsden's interpretations of Laura's portrait evince no knowledge of the social and legal implications of the yellow shawl evoked in Titian's contemporaries, it is mentioned only as a compositional element⁽¹³⁾.

There is another feature in the portrait that marks Laura's background. It is her sidelong glance. Attested in ancient literature as well as in the church fathers and widely used by Renaissance artists to indicate the deceitful allure of 'beautiful women,' Titian uses it with the tact required for a court portrait⁽¹⁴⁾. Laura averts her eyes suggesting pensiveness rather than coquettish inducement. The context, however, sent clear signals to the viewer of former times. We have to recover their meaning.

⁽¹²⁾ Once in the collection of Charles I, it was recently sold at auction: *Sotheby's. Important Old Master Paintings*, New York 29 January 2009, lot 33, pp. 90-97. Over a red bodice and a revealing chemise, the seductress Salome wears a diaphanous yellow shawl that comes down from her pearl-studded coiffure to encircle her neck and breasts. The baldric-style string of jewels is sometimes found with 'portraits' of well-to-do courtesans, such as the Venetian Veronica Franco (1546-1591) in the Art Museum in Worcester, Mass., Inv. 1948. 22, ascribed to a follower of Tintoretto, cf. LAWNER, *Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance* (New York, 1987) p. 58. An old hag in a yellow hood befitting the procuress stands behind Salome.

⁽¹³⁾BESTOR, 2003 (see n. 2) p. 653; WOODS-MARSDEN (see n. 2) p. 62.

⁽¹⁴⁾ KNAUER (see n. 4) p. 103, note 40; to the references cited there, Rudolf Kassel adds Priap. 36, 4: Venus is described as paeta, winking with the eyes. See also D. CAIRNS, *Bullish looks and sidelong glances: social interactions and the eyes in ancient Greek cultures*, chapt. 6, *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, D. Cairns (ed.) (Swansea, 2005). WOODS-MARSDEN (see n. 2) p. 61, notes the sidelong glance as indicative of the courtesan. The author, however, is unaware, of the rich store of classical references, also found in the church fathers, to the revealing revealing ὄμμα λοξόν - oculus obliquus - sidelong glance, with which the humanists and artists were perfectly familiar. – WOODS-MARSDEN, p. 57, does note the provocatively opened chemise revealing Laura's cleavage.



Fig. 6 – Titian, *Salomé with head of John the Baptist*.
Sold at auction, Sotheby's New York 29 January 2009

Prostitutes and Cortigiane oneste

With the frame of reference in place, we shall present and discuss a number of female portraits studied either rarely or extremely frequently. Many were created by leading masters of the period – yet they have never been considered in the context of our deliberations here. We begin with a drawing by Raphael that was touched by a later hand, thus losing some of its freshness; the iconography, however, has remained unchanged (Fig. 7)⁽¹⁵⁾. A young female with an elaborately plaited coiffure, possibly a hair piece⁽¹⁶⁾ entwined with a length of delicate material, is seated in profile in a strangely slouched position. The drawing was hardly intended to serve as the basis of a formal portrait. ‘Official’ depictions of ladies adhered to a prescribed decorum, foremost an upright bearing, stylish dress and, depending on the

⁽¹⁵⁾ Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, no. 57E, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) no. 34; A. Coliva (ed.) *Raffaello, da Firenze a Roma*, p. 31, fig. 10; *Disegni umbri del Rinascimento da Perugino a Raffaello: Catalogo della Mostra*, S. Ferino Pagden (ed.) (Florence, 1982) no. 24, pp. 328f., figs. 83-85.

⁽¹⁶⁾ By the middle of the fifteenth century, idealized and mythical females – foremost Venus herself – flaunt highly improbable coiffures built of multiple tresses and strings of pearls: Botticelli’s Simonetta Vespucci (see M.A. SCHMITTER, *Botticelli’s Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Poertrait and Ideal*, “Rutgers Art Review 15”, 1995, pp. 33-57), Piero di Cosimo’s Cleopatra (see D. GERONIMUS, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* [New Haven, 2006] pp. 48-75 and pl. 31) and Leonardo’s Leda – both quasi or totally in the nude – are prime examples. For Leonardo’s comment on a drawing of Leda’s coiffure that such a hairpiece is removable see Windsor, Royal Collection, RL 12516, 1503-1507. He uses tresses repeatedly in erotically charged works, see C. PEDRETTI, *Quella puttana di Leonardo*, “Achademia Leonardi Vinci IX”, 1996, 121-135. The plait entwined with yellow silk in the woodcut of a Venetian prostitute (Fig. 4) suggest that false hair was involved and was a mark of the street-walkers. For trade in curls see PIETRO ARETINO, *Dialogues*, transl. by R. Rosenthal (Toronto / Buffalo / London, 2005) p. 319: the Midwife tells the Whetnurse that she took a box full to a young widow of rather loose morals (e perciò tolgo una scatola piena di ricci proprio simili ai suoi capegli); the dialogue was published in 1534 / 1536.



Fig. 7 – Raphael, *Drawing of a Young Woman*.
Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Florence

age of the sitter, the appropriate hairdo and – cover. The strongest indication that Raphael sketched a young prostitute is the shawl about her shoulders, draped and knotted as encountered so frequently in ‘portraits’ that have long since been associated with the realm of courtesans – sometimes in mythological disguise. We mention only Moretto da Brescia’s Salome (Fig. 8), allegedly representing the famous courtesan Tullia d’Aragona (1510-1556) whose literary talents spared her the demeaning yellow-edged shawl that Cosimo I had decreed for prostitutes in 1546⁽¹⁷⁾.

Since the feature also occurs in the applied arts, a general understanding of its significance in the fifteenth and sixteenth century can be postulated. A pair of low-footed maiolica bowls show the profile busts of a couple, banderoles indicating their names and the date, 1524. “SILVIA Diva”, her plaited coiffure entwined with green material, is dressed in red and green and her neck encircled by the tell-tale knotted yellow shawl (Fig. 9).

⁽¹⁷⁾ See P.V. BEGNI REDONA, *Alessandro Bonvicino, Il Moretto da Brescia* (Brescia, La Scuola, 1988) no. 79, pp. 355f., Pinacoteca Civica Tosio e Martinengo, Brescia, inv. no. 81, ca. 1540. On a stone parapet is the inscription: QUAE SACRŪ[M] IOANNIS / CAPUT SALTANDO / OBTINUIT (who “obtained the head of Saint John by dancing” – Matthew 14, 1-12 and Marc 6, 14-29). The tradition that the painting is a portrait of the celebrated courtesan is not well attested. It is frequently discussed (see e.g., L. LAWNER, *Lives of the Courtesans* [above, n. 12] p. 172), however, no interpretation ever comments on her greyish-yellow knotted shawl and her bejewelled tresses are hardly ever mentioned. For Cosimo’s decree see S. BONGI, *Il velo giallo di Tullia d’Aragona*, “Rivista critica della letteratura italiana 3”, (1886-1887) pp. 85-95; Knauer (see n. 4) p. 100, note 26. Tullia was buried in Sant Agostino in Rome. Under Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605) the cleansing of courtesan’s tombs in Roman churches began. Falda’s map of Rome of 1676 shows a precinct *extra muros*, just north of the Porta del Popolo: *Cimitero delle donne meretrici*. The remains of such ladies may have been transferred there. The recent rise of gender studies and feminism has furthered interest in Tullia as a figure of considerable weight.



Fig. 8 – Moretto da Brescia, *Salomé*.
Pinacoteca Civica Tosio Martinengo, Brescia



Fig. 9 – SILVIA and LUTIO, *Tondi of two footed bowls*.
Private collection, Germany; British Museum, London

Her partner, “LUTIO,” responds by wearing an identical yet green shawl over his elegant outfit⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ *Art and Love* (see n. 1) cat. no. 13a (Private Collection, Germany), 13 b (British Museum, AF 3318), Urbino or Castel Durante. Her high-flown name also attests to her profession; for a choice of such names assigned to girls by their elderly prostitute mothers who also claim that they “are the daughters of noblemen and great monsignors” (...son figliole di signori e di monsignori), see Aretino’s *Dialogues* (see n. 16) p. 128. He also is informative on the semantics of colors. Young Nanna, back from her eye-opening stay at a nunnery, receives from her lover a small Book of Hours bound in green velvet, “which signifies love” (coperto di velluto verde, che significa amore); opening it, she finds it full of obscene images (ibid. p. 46). While being trained by her mother Nanna in the art of whoredom, Pippa reports on a dream of hers, ibid. p. 231f. She found herself “abbotly” (...badial badiale) on a crimson chair in a room, its walls “bedecked in green and yellow satin,” (...parata di raso verde e giallo) while donkeys, foxes, cloven-hooved animals and several birds roamed around, licking her although “it was futile for me to goad, fleece and flay them etc.” Nanna interprets the dream as the image of her daughter’s future career as a prostitute. Significantly, the colors of shame and love set the stage. Green for excessive love is a well-known symbol – we noted LIUTO’s scarf – and add another pas-



Fig. 10 – Raphael, *La Fornarina*.
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome

Raphael, unwed, lived with a beautiful girl and seems to have left us portraits of her, most notably the *Fornarina* (Fig. 10). Signal features of her status are rarely commented on in their combined effect: her nudity, the striped yellow / green silk scarf wound around her head, the transparent pale yellow veil she draws up to her breasts and the red garment that covers her lower body⁽¹⁹⁾.

sage from the *Dialogues*, *ibid.* p. 287: a lecher, to win his lady's affection, dressed all in green, "even his hair and beard were died green" (a la barba pare a me che si facesse far verde.) The name of Petrarch's Laura stands for green, Aretino, the professed anti-Petrarchan, repeatedly derides this persisting tradition. Celadon, the shepherd and hapless lover of Honoré d'Urfé's much read novel *Astrée* (1610-1627) comes to mind.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Her gesture and the enamelled armband bearing Raphael's name have always been recognized as references to classical statuary (*Venus pudica*; *Medici Venus*; *Capitoline Venus*), it should be noted, however, that these *veneres* shield their *pudenda* with thighs tightly compressed while the Fornarina opens them wide. Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, inv. 2333. For a detailed study see L. MOCHI ONORI (ed.), *La Fornarina di Raffaello* (Milan, 2002) pp. 35-54. The background originally showed a myrtle tree and a riverscape and is therefore often likened to Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci, yet it was painted over. The myrtle was retained and the foliage of a quince tree added (*cydonia oblonga*, a member of the rose family) - a well-known symbol of carnal love, see MOCHI ONORI, *Raffaello: La Fornarina* (Rome, 2000), for color details of the background: pls. XI a / b, and A.L. FRANCESCINI, pp. 19f., for a botanical analysis, also A. COLIVA (ed.), *Raffaello da Firenze a Roma* (Milan, 2006) p. 168; for the classical sources of the symbolism see [J. H.] ZEDLER, *Grosses Universal Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, vol. 30 (Leipzig / Halle, 1741, reprint Graz, 1996) cols. 390-395, specifically col. 391; one might add that ripe quinces are yellow. I shall argue that a different work by Leonardo inspired the change. Mochi Onori (2002) sees the painting in the context of 'Wedding portraits.' See the extensive study of D. A. BROWN / K. OBERHUBER, *Monna Vanna and Fornarina: Leonardo and Raphael in Rome*, Essays presented to Myron P. Gilmore, S. Betelli and G. Ramakus (eds.) (Florence, 1978) vol. II, pp. 25-86, and for more recent summaries of the history of the painting and its interpretation, H. CHAPMAN / T. HENRY / C. PLAZOTTA, *Raphael from Urbino to Rome* (National Gallery, London, 2004). Vasari names the courtesan Beatrice Ferrarese as one of Raphael's models: *Ritrasso et altre donne, e particolarmente quella sua, et altre infinite*, R. BETTARINI / P. BAROCCHI, *Giorgio Vasari, Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nella redazione del 1550 e 1568*

They were understood by Raphael's contemporaries immediately and were imitated deliberately to allude to courtesans. Whether the same young woman who served as model for the *Fornarina* may be recognized in Raphael's *Donna velata* remains an open question (Fig. 11). Because of her opulent silk costume and jewelry the *Donna velata* is almost invariably described as a Roman lady of considerable social standing. Three telltale features militate against this interpretation. Not only has the *Velata* alluringly opened her bodice, she also wears a low-cut shirt that invites more audacious steps – unimaginable details in the portrait of a respectable woman. The shawl of pale yellow silk – with small tassels at the fringed short ends – draped over her head clinches the case. Under the shawl is a yellow headscarf which holds a jewel. Her shawl is often cited, yet without convincing examples, as typical for a Roman matron and mother of children⁽²⁰⁾. Vasari who

(Florence, 1976) p. 199. For the problem of nudity seen through the psycho-analytical lens see G. DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Opening up Venus: nudity, cruelty and the dream, The Beholder. The Experience of Art in Early Modern Europe*, Th. Frangenberg / R. Williams (eds.), (Aldershot, UK / Burlington VT, 2006) pp. 37-47.

⁽²⁰⁾ Florence, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912, no. 245. Oberhuber in Brown / Oberhuber (see n.19) note 186, cites a letter by the Abate Gonzaga to Federico Gonzaga of January 22, 1526. He reports on a visit to the home of the just married Cardinal Cesarino: when being led to a room where the bride and many deeply veiled but well dressed females are gathered, he felt as though he had entered a nunnery. His question what those veils signify, is answered: *che come una donna à hauto figlioli l'ordine loro è che vadino vellate*. The *Velata* can hardly belong to that class. See also MOCHI ONORI (2002) (see n.19) fig. 28, pp. 45-47; COLIVA (see n. 19) pp. 278f., no. 101, there dated to 1512-13. Oberhuber (among others) noticed the same hair ornament in both paintings by Raphael and pointed to the pose of the Gioconda as the inspiration for the *Velata*. It is worth mention that Raphael 'quotes' Venetian courtesans' fashions: the strings of their low-cut ample shirts are often shown unfastened, their bodices opened, their breasts bared and a flimsy yellow veil affixed to hair or shoulders. Raphael deliberately stops short of revealing the busom, but the shadow of the cleavage is discretely shown, not unlike the Gioconda's. A lace-lined white *fazzoletto* is tantalizingly tucked into a slit of the rich creme-colored silk sleeve. Venetian



Fig. 11 – Raphael, *La Donna Velata*.
Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence



Fig. 12 – Raphael, *Portrait of Maddalena Doni*.
Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence

was familiar with the painting, knew better. Some of the details we just have enumerated are present in Titian's *Laura* too; they belong to the vocabulary of a universal language spoken and understood until late into the eighteenth century.

It has often been remarked how eagerly young Raphael studied and appropriated the strikingly novel compositions of Leonardo da Vinci while both were living in Florence in the early years of the sixteenth century. Raphael's picture of Maddalena Doni, the plump complacent bride of the merchant Angelo Doni of 1505 / 06 (Fig. 12) is one of the most conspicuous testaments to the impact Leonardo's *Gioconda* had on him during those years⁽²¹⁾. It is also reflected in portraits of other Florentine artists⁽²²⁾. Now, numerous copies – drawings as well as oils – of a work by Leonardo, believed to be lost, attest to his creation of a replica or a companion to the *Gioconda*, probably while he was still employed at the Milanese court: the so-called *Monna Vanna* and several versions of a nude *Gioconda*, among them one in Saint Petersburg, and the so-called *Gioconda Mackenzie* (Figs. 13, 14, 15)⁽²³⁾. The frequently cited passage in Leonardo's *Libro*

legislation continuously prohibited courtesans from using white kerchiefs, an emblem of respectable women, see *Leggi e memorie* (see n. 5) p. 145, no. 123 (26 February 1625): viene ... proibito alle meretrici l'uso de fazzoqli bianchi di seta ... così che ne per le strade, ne in chiese, ne in quasi voglia altro loco, debbino usati da esse. (... the use of white silk handkerchiefs by prostitutes is prohibited ... they must neither use them in the streets nor in churches or in any other location). The allusion to the Venetian milieu must have been obvious to the observer.

⁽²¹⁾ Florence, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912, no. 59. See e.g. COLIVA (see n. 19) pp. 35-65; C. SCAILLIÉREZ, *Leonardo da Vinci, La Joconde* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2003) figs. 55-57, two of his drawings; *Virtue & Beauty* (see n. 1) p. 78, figs. 14f.

⁽²²⁾ E.g., SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21), *L'effet immédiat de 'La Joconde'*, pp. 85-91; Coliva (see n. 17) nos. 37, 51, 52.

⁽²³⁾ See SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21), *Monna Lisa et Monna Vanna*, pp. 28-36, fig. 9. Her fig. 11 (drawing of bust of a nude girl by Leonardo, Windsor Castle, Royal Collection, PL 12793) attests to Leonardo as originator of the concept.

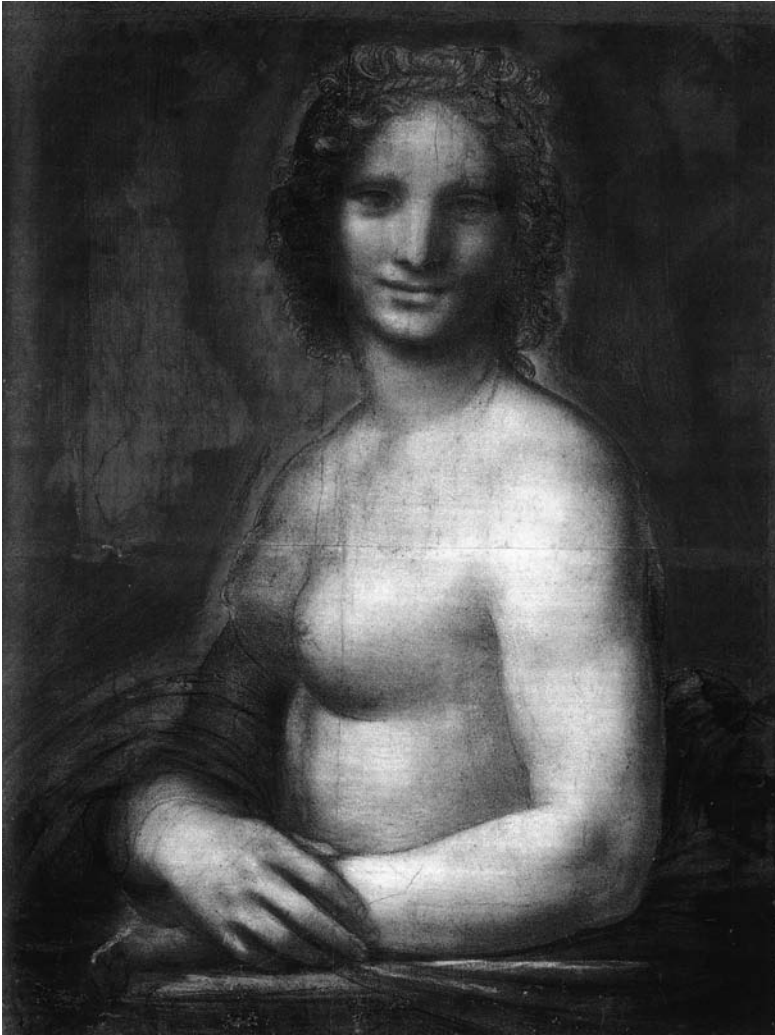


Fig. 13 – Leonardo da Vinci (attr.), *Monna Vanna*, Drawing.
Musée Condé, Chantilly



Fig. 14 – *Nude Gioconda*. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Fig. 15 – *Gioconda Mackenzie*. Private Collection, Switzerland

di Pittura (dated to ca. 1500-1505) where – in chapter 25 – he speaks of a painting capable of “accendere gli uomini ad amare” suggests that Leonardo’s infatuation with erotic subjects goes back to his stay at the court in Milan. It should give pause that the *Gioconda*, also dubbed *Monna Lisa*, a portrait generally accepted as the likeness of Lisa Gherardini, wife of the Florentine silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo, should coexist with a nude version of the sitter. In 1978, Oberhuber noted that Giorgione’s famous *Laura in Vienna* (1506) depended on a model by Leonardo⁽²⁴⁾. Giorgione is not known to have travelled to Florence at any time during his short life, Leonardo, however, having closed his workshop in Milan after the fall of his patron Ludovico il Moro visited Venice in 1500 before returning to Florence in 1501. His oeuvre travelled with him and was

In the exhibition catalogue *Leonardo, genio e visione in terra marchigiana*, (C. Pedretti, ed.) (Ancona, 2005) p. 36, cat. no. 9, the *Gioconda Mackenzie* (Private collection, Switzerland) - our Fig. 15 - is ascribed to Gian Giacomo Caprotti, il Salai, the pupil of Leonardo, and the picture is dated to 1510-1515; for a different date and convincing interpretation: A. Poma, *ibid*, pp. 113-118, see below, note 32. Carmen Bambach kindly drew my attention to the impending publication of the volume. See also P. C. MARANI, *Leonardo: La Gioconda*, “Art Dossier” (Florence, 2003) figs. on p. 28f. *Monna Vanna* is a recent arbitrary designation. Brown in BROWN / OBERHUBER (see n. 19) pp. 28-37, extensively discussed the numerous reflections of the lost *Monna Vanna* by Leonardo, which he assumes to have been commissioned by Giuliano de’Medici in Rome in 1513/14. Yet another version of the Saint Petersburg type was exhibited in the Museum of Vinci (Toscana) in June 2009 (reference owed to Andreas Daum). J. K. NELSON, *Leonardo e la reinvenzione della figura femminile: Leda, Lisa e Maria*, XLVI *Lettura Vinciana*, 22 aprile 2006 (Vinci, 2007), rightly stresses the influence of the *Monna Lisa* and the *Monna Vanna* on Raphael’s *Fornarina* and the *Donna Velata*; however, he sees a matron in the latter, pp. 13f.

⁽²⁴⁾ Neither Oberhuber in Brown / Oberhuber (see n.19) p. 47f., nor the author of cat. no. 38, Bellini, Giorgione, Titian (see n. 1), recognize the import of the tell-tale emblematic scarf wound around *Laura*’s head and breast, and a recent essay on Giorgione’s painting, *Art and Love* (see n. 1) cat. no. 145, is equally uninformative about the feature.

admired, among it, as I shall argue, there may have been the *Gioconda* and a nude version of the painting. Giorgione's much discussed Laura not only resonates with the visual impact of Leonardo's creations, but she also displays the tell-tale sign of the courtesan decreed by the local authorities. A diaphanous scarf with fine yellow stripes comes down from her head and is slung about her neck and breast.

We noted already that the existence of a clothed as well as a nude version of the *Gioconda* casts doubt on the former as a portrait of "Mona Lisa." If she were Lisa, it is unusual that her husband, the assumed patron, never seems to have claimed the painting. To buttress our skepticism we look at one of the few formal female portraits by Leonardo.

It is a work perhaps done at the behest of the ruler of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, "il Moro" (1452-1508). The opulent lifestyle and the easy-going mores of the duke provided a courtly atmosphere utterly alien to the city state of Florence. It is reflected in the unconventional posture and the lavish costume of Leonardo's Milanese sitter⁽²⁵⁾. The ravishing likeness of the young woman cradling an ermine at her breast has been identified as Cecilia Gallerani, who, before her marriage and while still a teenager, had been the Moro's mistress and bore him a son (Fig. 16)⁽²⁶⁾. Among the many perceptive interpretations of the

(25) Sumptuary laws were much less strictly enforced in Milan, a wealthy trading center with international flair, than in Florence, see E. VERGA, *Le leggi suntuarie milanesi: gli statuti del 1396-1498*, "Archivio storico lombardo 25", (1898) pp. 5-76.

(26) See Leonardo, *La dama con l'ermellino*, B. FABIAN and P. C. MARANI (eds.) Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali (Milan, 1998). The portrait - preserved in Cracow's Czartoryski Museum, inv. 134 - dates between 1489, when the remarkably literate Cecilia first caught the Duke's attention and 1490 when the frequently delayed wedding of Ludovico with Beatrice d'Este, the younger but far less discerning sister of Isabella, could no longer be postponed without serious political consequences. It took place in January 1491, while Cecilia remained at the Castello Sforzesco and gave birth to the Duke's son in



Fig. 16 – Giorgione, *Portrait of a Woman (Laura)*.
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Vienna

painting, one detail has been overlooked, a sign by which Leonardo signals her relationship to the duke and her social status. She gazes at her approaching lover, whose device, the ermine, she fondles in anticipation⁽²⁷⁾. A fine golden-edged veil covers her forehead, held in place by a black band, while her auburn hair is gathered in a textile cover at the nape of the neck – a typical Aragonese-Milanese hairstyle⁽²⁸⁾. We have frequently had occasion to note the yellow-edged veil and its significance.

The permissive climate of the ducal court to which we owe the portrait of the Moro's mistress may also have enhanced interest in depictions of nude courtesans – see our figures 13-15. The genre is well attested by a drawing by Leonardo and copies by his workshop⁽²⁹⁾. A fresh study of the *Nude Gioconda* (cf. Fig.

May of that year. To end the embarrassing situation, of the two options offered to her - monastery or marriage - she chose the latter in July 1492, see J. SHELL in *Leonardo, La dama con l'ermellino*, pp. 51-65.

⁽²⁷⁾ For the multiple suggestions made as to the symbolism of the ermine - among them purity - cf. B. FABIAN, *In margine all'ermellino, Leonardo. La dama coll'ermellino* (see n. 26) pp. 73-75; specifically notes 7-10, where it is argued that Leonardo's literary sources do not stress the ermine as a symbol of purity. Since the king of Naples had conferred the Order of the Ermine upon Il Moro in 1488, the animal will rather stand for Cecilia's lover; it can hardly refer to her as an intacta.

⁽²⁸⁾ The present hairdo is the result of later overpainting. For Cecilia's dress and hairstyle see G. BUTAZZI, *Note per un ritratto: vesti e acconciatura della 'Dama con l'ermellino'*, *Leonardo, La dama con l'ermellino* (see n. 27) pp. 67-71. Her textile-sheathed tress is called a *coazione* (forced or pressed together). As revealed by radiography, the painting has been tampered with: the background was blackened and Cecilia's hair implausibly made pass under her chin. The transparent veil with its golden border that now stops short at her temple did continue further down along her cheek; in Aragonese / Milanese fashion, her parted hair softly covered her ears, leaving only a small strand dangling. Milanese streetwalkers were forbidden to wear this hairstyle, cf. VERGA (see n. 25) pp. 40-42. Antonio de Beatis, Secretary of Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona, notes the especially rich attire of Milanese ladies who attend the small court of Charles V in Middelburg / Zeeland before the Emperor leaves by ship for Spain in 1517. For de Beatis see below, note 80, p. 182.

⁽²⁹⁾ See the Leonardo drawing in Windsor (RL 12793), Scaillièrez, fig. 11,

15) – formerly in the Muir Mackenzie Collection, now in a Swiss collection – has made a very convincing case for the origin of the painting at the court of Ludovico il Moro and for Leonardo's involvement⁽³⁰⁾.

What does the Word *Gioconda* mean?

As Poma has shown, the laws of Italian word formation exclude the widely accepted assumption that *La Gioconda* characterizes Lisa Gherardini as the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, and the woman depicted in Leonardo's painting⁽³¹⁾.

bust of a nude, mentioned above, n. 23. Fig. 13: Chantilly, Musée Condé, inv. 32(27); Fig. 14, St. Petersburg, Hermitage. Already Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444-1476) had commissioned portraits of beautiful young ladies of his duchy in 1473, cf. Campbell (see n.1), pp. 218-220; also Knauer (see n. 4) p. 109f, note 63, and *ibid.*, note 62.

⁽³⁰⁾ A. POMA, *Leonardo, genio e visione* (see n. 23) pp. 116-119, "L'iconologia dell'dipinto," who reports on the results of radiographic investigations: the figure was originally seen in three-quarter view (to be turned en face shortly after), the garment was probably red and the hair shorter. The changes were executed with a medium (Bianco Sangiovese) rare in panel painting but used in Leonardo's Last Supper and the painting process was very slow. The date is given as about 1500. The panel was altered by overpainting about 1600 and later. Before being brought to England in 1850 it had been in the possession of a notable Milanese family for centuries. Poma relates the recently renovated lunettes above the Last Supper, three of the four decorated with prunes in their foliage (referring in a symbolic way to the erotic disposition of Ludovico il Moro) and the Monna Vanna: a splendid spalliera of plum trees fills the background of the painting. He gives the painting to Leonardo. For the lunettes see P. BRAMBILLA BABILON / P. MARANI, *Le lunette di Leonardo nel refettorio delle Grazie*, "Quaderni di Restauro", R. Zorzi (ed.) (Milan, 1990). For the treatment of the spalliera cf. LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Libro di Pittura*, Codice Urbinate lat. 1270 nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, C. Pedretti (ed.), C. Vecce, (transcription) (Florence, 1995), vol. I, p. 490, [875] *De' lustri delle foglie delle piante*.

⁽³¹⁾ J. M. GREENSTEIN, *Leonardo, Mona Lisa and La Gioconda. Reviewing the Evidence*, "Artibus et Historiae, An Art Anthology", no. 50 (XXV) (Vienna - Cracow, 2004) pp. 17-38, also successfully rebuts any attempt to identify the

No securely attested cases are known of a spouse being called after her husband's surname by giving it a feminine ending. What then does the name imply? The answer comes from Milan. In a highly appreciative ordinance endowing an outgoing mistress of his, Lucrezia Crivelli, Ludovico il Moro refers to her as a *gioconda*, a generic term for a courtesan. The Latin root of the word, *iucundus*, indicates that she is a purveyor of pleasure⁽³²⁾.

Gioconda with Lisa Gherardini. He does not take the painting for a portrait: "Painted for display, not for a patron, *La Gioconda* is a show-piece of art" (p. 32). See also P. C. MARANI, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings*, transl. by A. Lawrence Jenkins (New York, 2000) p. 198: "Mona Lisa is a portrait *par excellence*. The image is a 'type,' or universal model into which the painter has poured all his acquired knowledge, all his 'science,'" yet, for him the Gioconda and the Mona Lisa are the same picture. The existence of Lisa and her family is well attested by documents, see e.g., the collection by G. PALLANTI, *Mona Lisa Revealed. The True Identity of Leonardo's Model* (Milan, 2006).

⁽³²⁾ Bartolomeo Calco, the learned chancellor of the Moro, was the author of the document by which the Duke presented his mistress – Beatrice d'Este having died in 1497 - with an estate in recognition of her 'services' to him: *ex iucunda illius consuetudine ingentem saepe voluptatem senserimus*, cf. POMA (see n. 23) pp. 113-118, English summary pp. 155-158. This persuasive study sadly lacks notes. In a close study of the original meaning and later development of the Latin term *iucundus* = providing pleasure (etymologically deriving from *iuvare* = be useful, support, help, so rightly CICERO, *DE FINIBUS* II, 14, in his discussion of the philosophy of Epicurus), that was also used in an erotic sense (e.g., CATULLUS, *carmen* 62, 47 [Rudolf Kassel adds *carm.* 109, 1] and Ovid, *passim*), Poma shows that Christian authors, abhorring this doctrine, gave *iucundus* the meaning of pleasant, happy, friendly. When the humanists rediscovered Epicurean philosophy as well as Roman love poetry, the original significance reemerged and was quickly applied in its original sense e.g., by erudite writers in Milan and elsewhere. That Leonardo was familiar with the context is proved by a word list in the *Codex Trivulzianus* where terms such as *jocunda* and *Illaida* (*laida*) occur among others for prostitutes (for further examples of the rare term *laida* see P. BETTELLA, *The Ugly Woman. Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* [Toronto / Buffalo / London, 2005] pp. 56; 171, and *passim*). For the term *Gioconda* current in Leonardo's circle cf. GREENSTEIN (see n. 30) pp. 17-20 in particular. For the term in that sense see S. BATTAGLIA, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. VI (Turin, 1970) s.v. *giocondo*, 5. ...Che reca godimento ai sensi; 12. ...voluttuoso.

The German *Freudenmädchen* is the exact equivalent of the concept.

Now to Vasari's description of Leonardo's *Gioconda* (Fig. 17). Until recently, he was believed to be the first to assign this name to the sitter. It has often been remarked that the wealth of details he notes concerning her face do not correspond to the actual painting. Though he does not say so, Vasari cannot have seen the *Gioconda* and must have relied on oral reports. By the time of the first edition of the *Vite* in 1550 the painting had been in France for many years⁽³³⁾. However, numerous important studies of the painting that have appeared over the last few years still adhere to Vasari's identification of the *Gioconda* with a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo. Vasari notes that Leonardo worked on such a portrait for four years without finishing it and he adorns his tale with the pleasant fiction of how the painter tried to keep his sitter happy. This is a typical artist's anecdote, a genre that goes back to antiquity and was much practiced in Florence itself.

Two of the many recent studies are particularly helpful. In the first, all extant sources relevant to Leonardo's *Gioconda* are meticulously investigated and the development of portrait painting before his time is perceptively assayed⁽³⁴⁾. The second work documents the non-invasive analysis of the panel by a team of scientists with sophisticated refractive methods performed at the Louvre in 2004/05⁽³⁵⁾. Although no pigments could be removed

⁽³³⁾ For the possible dates and circumstances of the acquisition by François I cf. SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21) p. 25f., P. MARANI, *Leonardo. La Gioconda* (see n. 23) pp. 23-25, GREENSTEIN (see n. 31), p. 17f., and below, n. 81.

⁽³⁴⁾ SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21) pp. 43-58.

⁽³⁵⁾ The work appeared in French, English, and German; I have used the latter version: J.-P. MOHAN, M. MENU, B. MOTTIN, *Im Herzen der Mona Lisa: Dekodierung eines Meisterwerks. Eine wissenschaftliche Expedition in die Werkstatt des Leonardo da Vinci* (Schirmer / Mosel, 2006). Pascal Cotte, developer of the camera for the multispectral scanning of the painting that allowed the recovery of the original colors used by Leonardo, announced in a press conference in October 2007 that a high resolution photograph he created shows –



Fig. 17 – Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani*.
Czartoryski Museum, Cracow

for study, the results are illuminating since they succeed in establishing the original hues Leonardo utilized. Numerous layers of varnish applied from early on had already obscured the evidence by the later sixteenth century. Yet, as proved by the scientific investigation, the coatings have preserved the integrity of the surface, and the painting is in excellent condition. The generous format of the published volume with its large illustrations is truly amazing and immensely useful. However, a chapter devoted to the interpretation of the painting as a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo, disappoints since many details are misread.

Leonardo's *Gioconda*

Our own brief description begins with the highly imaginative scenery in the background. Much has been made of an alleged dichotomy of the mountainscape; Leonardo seems to have chosen different perspectives at either side of the figure though it is not immediately apparent to the viewer. A translucent band of mist trailing between the craggy ranges at the upper right of the landscape – to which corresponds a fainter one on the left at the same height – is sometimes mistaken for a body of water⁽³⁶⁾. If this were so, it would indeed break up the unity and inner logic of the cosmic view. The bridge in the right middle ground that crosses the river (which probably drains the lake on the left and seems to

among other features – that the *Gioconda* was given eyebrows and eyelashes. They were removed at some point. He also maintains, that the slight but obvious changes in the position of the fingers of her left hand prove that she held “a blanket on her stomach.” This could easily be part of the large transparent veil. The results of Cotte’s efforts were part of the exhibit “Da Vinci: An Exhibition of Genius” at the Metreon in San Francisco (closed 31 December 2007).

⁽³⁶⁾ E.g., D. ARASSE, *The Gioconda Code*, “Queen’s Quarterly. A Canadian Review”, (Summer 2006) pp. 180-185.

receive a tributary from the right) is often referred to as the single man-made object. Just below the bridge, a screen of craggy rocks causes rapids. Though not mentioned, the new publication by Mohan and his colleagues demonstrates the presence of a minute castle perched on the rocky outcrop that dominates and splits the first bend of the winding dirt road on the left⁽³⁷⁾. It adds another human element and redeems the bridge from its isolation⁽³⁸⁾. Clearly unfinished is the rust-colored hill behind Monna Lisa's left shoulder. As will be seen later when we venture an answer to the possible identity of the lady, her elevated position above the striking panorama makes perfect sense, (Fig. 18).

The investigation has definitely established the absence of any column shafts at either margin of the painting; Leonardo gives only their bases on the ledge of the balustrade in front of

⁽³⁷⁾ D. ARASSE, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Rhythm of the World* (New York, 1997) p. 393, suggests that it might be an ancient riverbed and takes the landscape to be inspired by Leonardo's studies of the Arno valley. The phantastic mountains are hardly rooted in reality, some features may go back to the painter's excursions into the Alps beyond Lake Como in 1492, see C. PEDRETTI, *Uno studio per la 'Gioconda', "L'Arte"* (Luglio-Settembre 1959) p. 170, figs. 10f.; A. RECALCATI, *Le prealpi lombarde ritratte da Leonardo*, "Achademia Leonardi Vinci X", (1997) pp. 125-133, and the contribution by C. PEDRETTI in *La "Madonna dei Fusi" di Leonardo e il paesaggio del Valdarno Superiore*, C. Starnazzi, ed., exhibit. catal. July 1 - November 15, 2000 (Arezzo, 2000). See also F. ZÖLLNER, *Il paesaggio di Leonardo da Vinci fra scienza e simbolismo religioso*, "Raccolta Vinciana 31", 2005 (2006) pp. 231-256, who emphasizes the religious character of the painting because of its resemblance to his images of the Virgin. For the theoretical underpinnings of the mountainscape cf. *Il Libro di Pittura* (see n. 30) pp. 452-461, [791] - [808]: Delle ombrosità e chiarezze de' monti.

⁽³⁸⁾ Cf. MOHAN (see n. 35) p. 77, pl. 19. The flat-roofed towers recall types known from several of Leonardo's sketches, see P. C. MARANI, *L'architettura fortificata negli studi di Leonardo da Vinci: con catalogo completo dei disegni* (Florence, 1984) p. 183, no. 104, map of the plain of Arezzo; M. KEMP, *Leonardo da Vinci: Experience, Experiment and Design* (Princeton / Oxford, 2006) p. 184, the apocalyptic scene, Windsor castle, Royal Collection 12388, and *ibid.*, RL 12409, SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21), fig. 40. Cf. *Il Libro di Pittura* (see n. 30) p. 333, the drawing that accompanies [479].

which the woman's wooden arm-chair stands. This type of seat is called *a pozzetto*, lacking a high back⁽³⁹⁾. It is seen from the side while the sitter's upper body, by being turned to the viewer adds great spatial depth to the composition and leads the eye across the parapet into the depth of the vast landscape.

A strictly factual description will contrast the iconography of the painting with that of a number of fifteenth and early sixteenth century portraits of upper class women. This should enable us to firmly establish the social status of the sitter. Superbly smooth, the woman's features are lacking in conventional beauty. The receding hairline may be the result of fashionable plucking, as are the missing eyebrows – pace Vasari who extolls their lifelikeness. The slightly contracted eyelids and the famous smile bestow a shade of mockery on the face. There is a wart in the corner of the left eye socket, barely discernible in the shadow cast by the bridge of the nose, however, it is there⁽⁴⁰⁾.

⁽³⁹⁾ Cf. MOHAN (see n. 35) fig. 110. Leonardo may have known portraits such as Piero del Pollaiuolo's profile view of a lady seated in front of a balustrade that is inlaid with plaques of porphyry; instead of a landscape the background shows the blue sky; see Berlin, *Gemäldegalerie*, 1614, ca. 1465.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ E. GUIDONI, *La 'Gioconda' di Leonardo, "opera de facti e precepti"* (Rome, 2006) p. 10, rightly draws attention to the presence of a wart and sees in it "the imperfection to be found even in the most perfect face." In tune with the tendency of his book to read hidden meanings into the painting purposefully contrived by Leonardo, he connects the wart (*verruca*) with the name of his teacher 'Verr-occhio' (p. 41) and also assumes the wart to refer to the mountain fortress La Verruca outside of Pisa, of which a drawing and a reference in the map of Tuscany by the artist exists, cf. MARANI (see n. 38) p. 67, fig. XXVI, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Ms 8936, f. 4r., and E. VILLATA (ed.) *Leonardo da Vinci: I documenti e testimonianze contemporanee* (Milan, 1999) document 178, p. 159. In the war against Pisa, Niccolò Machiavelli had sent Leonardo to inspect the fortress on 21 June 1503 which, according to Guidoni, provided him with one of the bird's-eye perspectives present in the Monna Lisa. Leonardo was certainly fond of such allusions - as were many of his contemporaries - but when one accepts Guidoni's suggestion, it is ironic that he should not have discovered the little stronghold above the road although he lists Mohan's work in his bibliography.



Fig. 18 – Leonardo da Vinci, *La Gioconda*. Musée du Louvre, Paris

The sitter appears at supreme ease; she does not wear a single piece of jewelry.

Her curly auburn hair is parted in the middle and tumbles down to her shoulders and chest. It is covered by a transparent veil whose fine rolled edge hugs her forehead and – following the outline of face and hair – is delineated against the sky and the lake to disappear behind her loose curls at the height of her neck at the left; it cannot be traced on the right⁽⁴¹⁾. A far larger veil of slightly denser but still translucent beige gauze covers the back of her head to come down on her shoulders and upper arms where it is gathered in a scroll about the elbows. In addition, a yellow scarf is draped over the woman's left shoulder; slightly twisted, it can be followed downwards to her deeply shaded lap⁽⁴²⁾.

Age old layers of varnish have obscured the original color of her dress. At present it appears to be of a heavy greenish-brown material. Thanks to the refractory investigation it can be understood to have been of rich red silk, probably velvet. At the very low neckline the fabric is gathered in fine dense pleats that are held in place by gold thread embroidery in an elegant loop pattern. Leonardo was intrigued by the rational aesthetics of such knots⁽⁴³⁾. The light plays on the glittering coils and on the soft

⁽⁴¹⁾ Already in the sixteenth century it is described as black and denoting widowhood; however, the multiple layers of varnish which have darkened the fine hem are to blame.

⁽⁴²⁾ WOODS-MARSDEN, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n. 1) p. 87, note 110, mentions the scarf as an unusual feature. Mohan (see n. 35) and his colleagues assume the sitter to have gathered her hair in a bun, covered by a coif at the back of her head and to have pulled out a few strands to frame her face, as was the fashion of the day. They simply mistake the large veil coming down from the back of her head which is slightly lighter in hue than her hair for a coif. Cf. *Il Libro di Pittura* (see n. 30) p. 262 [291]: Della bellezza de' volti: Non si faccia muscoli con aspra definizione, ma li dolci lumi finiscano insensibilmente nelle piacevoli e dilettevoli ombre, e di questo nasce grazia a formosita (dated to ca. 1500-1505).

⁽⁴³⁾ Several copies attest to this color scheme, e.g., the fine version in Baltimore (37.1138, ca. 1630-1660) painted over a St. Veronica by Simon Vouet

edges of the closely gathered velvet at the woman's décolleté. No shirt is shown at its edge, nor is her bust covered by the prescribed *corverciere*, a 'modesty piece' of white silk or the finest linen that should envelop shoulders and chest of young women and matrons alike. Yet the sitter is wearing a shirt; ample folds erupt between bodice and sleeve and are visible through the diaphanous beige veil that descends from her head to the bend of her left arm. Two small triangular flaps protrude from the bodice at the shoulder, lacking, however, the laces necessary to fasten the red upper sleeve to the red dress⁽⁴⁴⁾. Most striking in color and technique are the heavy cuff-like sleeves covering the sitters forearms: golden lights shimmer on the creases of the precious saffron-colored material which is much more daringly rendered than any other part of the painting⁽⁴⁵⁾.

of the 1630s. Warm thanks to Gary Vikan for information, cf. the website the-walters.org/wcontent/files/pages_new/mona_lisa.aspx. Decorative knots were already fashionable in Milan before Leonardo arrived in 1482; such patterns were spread widely through engravings, see C. BAMBACH, *Leonardo, Tagliente, and Dürer: 'La scienza del far di groppi'*, "Achademia Leonardi Vinci 4" (1991) pp. 72-93; ead. / L. WHITACKER, "The lost Knots," *ibid.*, pp. 107-110; P. VENTURELLI, *Una bella invenzione: Leonardo e la moda a Milano*, "Achademia Leonardi Vinci X" (1997) pp.101-116; A. ROVETTA, *L'Ambrosiana e Leonardo*, Milan, Biblioteca-Pinacoteca Ambrosiana 1. XII. 1998 - 30. IV. 1999, no. 59, cf. SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21) pp. 40f., fig. 17. For details of the embroidery on Monna Lisa's dress: Mohan (see n. 35) figs. 111f. Leonardo coiled similar golden ropes through the foliage of the bower into which he had turned the the *Sala delle Asse* in the north tower of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan (1498); it is badly defaced by overpainting. Dürer copied engravings made after Leonardo's knots while on his second Venetian voyage, see "Die sechs Knoten," K.-A. KNAPPE, *Dürer: Das graphische Werk* (Vienna / Munich, 1964) pp. 246-251.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ They are shown e.g., at the shoulders of Raphael's Maddalena Doni (cf. Fig. 12) .

⁽⁴⁵⁾ One might almost say *alla prima*. Leonardo was in Venice in the company of the Franciscan friar and mathematician Luca Pacioli between December 1499 and March 1500 (for a conspectus of secure dates in Leonardo's life cf. M. Kemp [see n. 37] pp. 199-206); see also P. MARANI, *Leonardo a Venezia e nel Veneto: documenti e testimonianze, Leonardo &*

Since the painting is thought to have been painted in Florence between 1503 and 1506 and purportedly depicts the third wife of a well-to-do local silk merchant, one would expect it to reflect local pictorial traditions and social conventions. As we shall see, it utterly fails to do so. Let us look at a number of female images of the period. The Ghirlandaio workshop offers many examples.

Florentine Brides and Wives

A bust-length portrait of a young woman is in the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts (Fig. 19)⁽⁴⁶⁾. Seen in three-quarter view, she stands behind a cloth-covered parapet before a wide landscape. The lady's posture and the scenery have counterparts in the *Gioconda*. There too is a river with bridge, a winding road and a fortified town dominated by a castle. How placid and domesticated it is by contrast! A Netherlandish concept in origin, this

Venezia, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (Milan, 1992) pp. 23-36. This sojourn must have exposed him to the sea change in fashion occurring there at that time and familiarized him with the standard color combination of the courtesans' attire: red and yellow (see Fig. 4). The rendering of Monna Lisa's yellow sleeves smacks of Venetian art. For the great variety of material shown and their treatment by the painter cf. *Il Libro di Pittura* (see n. 29) pp. 354-360, [529]-[544]... De' panni e modo di vestir le figure con grazia e degli abiti e natura de' panni...; cf. also *ibid.* p. 294 [387] De' posati di femminee giovanette, for the decent position of the legs.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ See *Virtue and Beauty* (see n. 1) pp.186-189, no. 29. For models of the background landscape see P. NUTTALL, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Paintings, 1400-1500* (New Haven, 2004); cf. p. 228, fig. 251, where the author points to the influence of Memling on the concept of the *Gioconda*. See also B. AIKEMA, *Netherlandish Painting and early Renaissance Italy: artistic rapports in a historiographical perspective*, "Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, volume IV, Forging European Identities", H. Roodenburg (ed.) (Cambridge, 2007) pp. 100-137.



Fig. 19 – Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of a Lady*. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts

type of portrait was eagerly adopted when Leonardo and Botticelli introduced it in Florence. Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* of about 1474-1478 is a prime example.

As a young wife – the precious pendant, the finger ring and the orange blossom identify the sitter as such – she would wear her, probably dyed, hair in a bun fixed by a piece of linen that tapers into laces which are fastened by a slip-knot under the chin. The feature is clearly depicted here and in a number of other contemporary portraits⁽⁴⁷⁾, though the bow is often omitted, probably for aesthetic reasons. However, without its catch the bun would not stay in place. The bun is, moreover, covered with a small neatly embroidered cap. The crimped curls pulled out at the temples hide the ears and – conveniently – the unsightly straps that run underneath. It is not unlikely that this hairstyle came into fashion as a consequence of severe sumptuary laws decreed in Florence in the 1470s and 80s⁽⁴⁸⁾. They restricted the wearing of jewelry to brides and young wives and prescribed the utmost decency in garb, including head-covers and, most importantly, the *coverciere* or modesty piece to mask the décolleté⁽⁴⁹⁾.

This piece of transparent finery comes in diverse cuts and

⁽⁴⁷⁾ See e.g., the drawing of a young woman by Domenico Ghirlandaio in the Uffizi (Inv. 298 E), about 1485-1590, SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21) fig. 18; the drawing of a woman's head, Chatsworth, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) pp. 203f., no. 33. See also the straps running from the bun towards the neck on the medal of Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni, *ibid.* no. 11.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See J. M. NAJEMY, *History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Oxford, 2006) chapter 8, "Family and State in the Age of Consensus", pp. 219-249; WOODS-MARSDEN, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) p. 77.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ After the middle of the fifteenth century, there are instances where the head scarf is large enough to serve as *coverciere*, too, see e.g. Fra Filippo Lippi's profile portrait of a lady in Berlin, *Gemäldesammlung 1700*, ca. 1445, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n. 1) no. 4; Botticelli, profile portrait of a lady, private collection, included in a Christie's sale in New York, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 January 2007, no. 23, p. 46. Also Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio's portrait of a lady, Isola Bella, collection of the Princes Borromeo, *La dama con l'ermellino* (see n. 27) p. 39, fig. 12.



Fig. 20 – Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Ginevra Benci*.
National Gallery of Art, Washington

designs. In its simplest form it covers the neck, is fixed by a gold or coral button or a pin and disappears under the upper edge of the bodice, as seen in Ginevra de' Benci's portrait (Fig. 20)⁽⁵⁰⁾ Ginevra also wears a bun cover or coif which certainly was fastened under the chin, but Leonardo omits the slip-knot⁽⁵¹⁾. The *coverciere* of the sitter in the Clark painting is a larger model. It not only veils the décolleté but also partly covers the shoulders and the laced bodice and ends in a triangle just above the lady's belt. It is so diaphanous that it can be traced only by following its fine rolled edges and it hardly alters the hue of her cinnabar colored woolen dress that it partly overlays. Domenico Ghirlandaio's likeness of Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici, the mother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, in the National Gallery in Washington (Fig. 21), displays the same type of *coverciere* and bun-holder plus coif, though augmented by the veil prescribed as hair cover for matrons. The *coverciere* worn by Raphael's Maddalena Doni has a black pearled edge, probably a chain,

⁽⁵⁰⁾ For a survey of fashion terms cf. R. ORSI LANDINI / M. WESTERMAN BULGARELLA, *Costume in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraits of Women, Virtue and Beauty* (see n. 1) pp. 88-97, and WOODS-MARSDEN, *Portrait of a Lady*, *ibid.* pp. 61-87; *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Cesare Vecellio's Habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parte del mondo*, etc., A.R. Jones / M. Rosenthal (transl.) (London / New York, 2008) Glossary pp. 580-593.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Washington, National Gallery, 1967.6.1. Cf. *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) no. 16. The painting displays a number of unusual features: if represented as a bride, the lack of a veil would be appropriate, as a married woman Ginevra should wear one besides the little coif. This bun cover unusually has black stripes woven in and – even more strangely – a black shawl lies about her shoulders; it is, to the best of my knowledge, hardly ever mentioned and never interpreted in the many extant descriptions of the painting. Since the Latin motto on the obverse – *Virtutem forma decorat*: Beauty adorns Virtue – with the delicately painted stems of juniper, laurel and palm, referring to her 'Platonic' relationship with Bernardo Bembo, appears a later addition (J. SHEARMAN, *Only Connect...* [see n. 1] p. 118, assigns it tentatively to Jacometto Veneziano), the same may hold good for the black scarf, perhaps indicating her recent widowhood. She married Luigi di Bernardo di Lapo Niccolini at age sixteen in 1474, they had no children and he died in 1505, she in 1521.



Fig. 21 – Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici*. National Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig. 22 – Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait drawing of Isabella d'Este*.
Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Paris

whose ends are wound into her belt, thus securely enhancing the perfect fit of the modesty piece. The device is found frequently in paintings of the period and is often mistaken for the chain of a pendant that the bride or young wife supposedly conceals in her bodice. Maddalena is coiffed in a style made fashionable by Isabella d'Este about 1500. Leonardo's life-size drawing of the marchioness (Fig. 22) shows her wearing her loose hair in the finest of snoods⁽⁵²⁾. Maddalena's ribbon is a black zig-zag. The hairnet does not catch curls coming down from the temples, and both painters take pains to show single hairs escaping from it.

Among the numerous female portraits from the years between 1475 to about 1500, one would look in vain for long free-flowing hair as worn by Monna Lisa since it denoted erotic allure and lack of decorum⁽⁵³⁾. It is found only with young girls and in images of the Virgin, who also occasionally displays quite daring décolletés. The *immaculata* is neither bride nor matron but a maiden exempt from the sartorial constraints of the matur-

(52) The cartoon in the Louvre (Département des Arts graphiques, M.I. 753), about 1500, has suffered over time. Since it was punctured for transfer, one can follow the outline of the fine material that billows over Isabella's forehead and is held in place by a simple band. Leonardo never undertook to paint the portrait despite her repeated insistence, see the letter of 3 April 1501, to her from Florence, by Pietro da Novellara, reporting that Leonardo has created only a cartoon of St. Anne so far, cf. VILLATA (see n. 40) document 150, pp. 134f. The drawing shows the marchesa without jewelry (certainly to be added in the finished painting) and with a remarkable décolleté. The gathered shirt shows at the square neckline, and the slightest hint of a coverciere is visible on her left shoulder. Isabella was a stylish trendsetter; she may have furthered the revolution in contemporary fashion and best observed in portraits of females in Venice in the first years of the sixteenth century. See Y. C. CROIZAT, *Living Dolls: François Ier Dresses his Women*, "Renaissance Quarterly" 60, 1" (Spring 2007) pp. 94-127. The French king asked Isabella to send him a fashion doll with all the pertinent pieces, underwear as well as state robes, in order to outfit his court ladies according to the latest trend. Isabella also advised on and provided beauty products to her equals at other courts.

(53) Cf. e.g. WOODS-MARSDEN, *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) p. 79, note 108.



Fig. 23 – Hans Holbein, *Drawing of the Virgin Mary*.
Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig

er members of her sex. Holbein's drawing of 1519 may serve as an example (Fig. 23)⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Though having established the original hues of Monna Lisa's apparel with utmost scientific precision, Mohan and his colleagues misread her hairdo as well as the cut of her dress and its significance in order to uphold the traditional identity of the sitter. The slightly lighter color of the large beige shawl draped over the back of her head may have induced the authors to see here a cap-covered bun although not the slightest protuberance interrupts the smooth outline of her head.

That Lisa, the mother of three children, is represented without the signal accouterments of an upper class Florentine lady, white cap and – worse still – without the *coverciere* escapes Mohan and his colleagues. Instead, they assert that she is wearing a *guarnello*, a transparent long-sleeved morning – or house-gown worn over the *gamurra*, the main garment. The *guarnello* was apparently donned occasionally by expectant mothers. Botticelli's so called Smeralda Brandini provides a perfect example⁽⁵⁵⁾. Mohan and his colleagues cite the latest pregnancy of Monna Lisa as a pretext but disregard the fact that a *guarnello* is invariably worn in conjunction with the *coverciere*. They seem to have mistaken the highlights on the gathered creases at the neck of Monna Lisa's red velvet dress for a transparent *guarnello* and the sheer yellow shawl that envelopes her head and upper arms for part of the supposed garment⁽⁵⁶⁾.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste, Inv. NI.25; see *Hans Holbein the Younger* (see n. 10) pp. 205f., no. 43.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Cf. *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) no. 25.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Over her red *gamurra* Smeralda wears the *coverciere* with the *guarnello*, as does Verrocchio's marble bust of a lady with a nosegay in the Bargello: *Virtue and Beauty* (see n.1) no. 22. More than sixty copies of the Monna Lisa done between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries have been identified; reviewing them helps to clarify her garment. An anonymous Spanish copy of the sixteenth century is particularly enlightening, color print in A. CHASTEL, *L'illustre incomprise* (Paris, 1988) p. 14, for other copies: pp. 16-21; R.

Among the facts established by the scientists is the beige tinge of Monna Lisa's large scarf. It is not without interest that on a much degraded oil painting showing an unsmiling Monna Lisa in the possession of the Portland / Maine Museum of Art the ground of her shawl is preserved: it is rust colored and could never have served as a prime for a white but only for a beige or yellow veil (Fig. 24)⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Having assembled arguments that militate against Leonardo's painting representing Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo, we shall revert to observations made at

McMULLEN, *Mona Lisa, the Picture and the Myth* (Boston, 1975); see also the large drawing in the Hyde Collection, Glen Falls, N.Y. (Inv. 1971.71), that almost equals the size of the original and is on sixteenth-century paper (however, tampered with later by turning the figure into that of a saint). The drawing was on exhibition in Spring 2006 in Glen Falls, N.Y.; I wish to thank Erin Coe for communicating the well attested provenance of the piece leading back to the family of Francesco Melzi, pupil, friend and principal heir of Leonardo. For an illustration cf. SCAILLIÈREZ (see n. 21) fig. 45, and the website of the collection <http://www.hydecollection.org/collections/details-image.cfm?ID=43>.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ First published by C. PEDRETTI, *Uno studio per la Gioconda*, *L'Arte* 24, 3 (Luglio - Settembre 1959) pp. 155-22; he defends the authenticity of the work as a first version (at the time in a private collection in Switzerland). It lacks a strip at the bottom and originally equaled the Monna Lisa in size but the lady does not smile. To the extent that the much abraded and painted over surface can be read, the unfinished study was partly done by a left-handed artist. Originally done in tempera on paper, it was transferred to a panel at an unknown date. It is worth mention that the parapet behind the Monna Lisa and the Portland woman is slightly sloping to the right, enhancing the perspective, see PEDRETTI, p. 161. The work was bequeathed to the Portland Museum of Art (Maine) by the industrialist Henry H. Reichhold in 1983 who had acquired it in the 1960s after the demise of its European owner. It was extensively analyzed in March 1983 at the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at Harvard University resulting in an assumed date before 1510. It went on exhibition in the Portland Museum during the summer months of 2006. I am most grateful to Kristen Levesque and Diana O'Donnell of the Museum, who permitted access to part of the scientific study by the Straus Center. The painting appears not to be a copy but a predecessor of the Paris version, perhaps by a pupil with the master's collaboration.

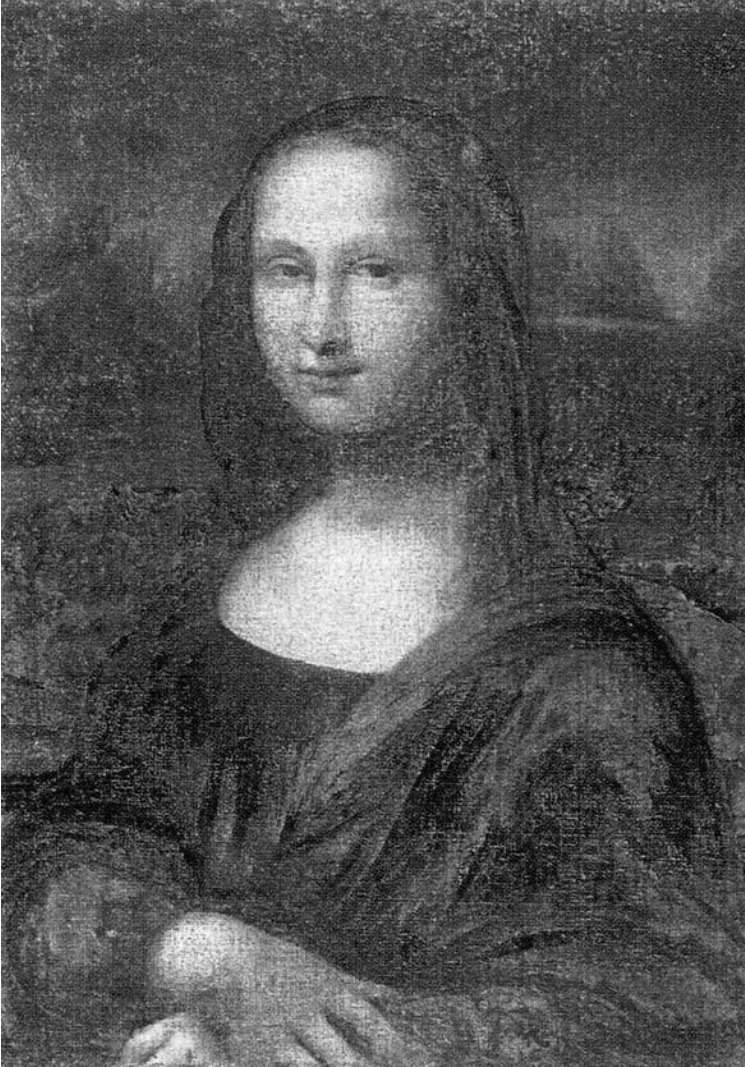


Fig. 24 – Leonardo da Vinci, *Early version of La Gioconda*.
Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine

the beginning of this study. We noted that the age-old negative connotation of the color yellow included publicly marking undesirable elements of society such as Jews and prostitutes since late medieval times⁽⁵⁸⁾. Yellow emblems or hats for Jews, yellow or yellow-edged scarfs for the streetwalkers. The ever repeated legislation passed by the authorities to enforce observance is best documented in Venice. The very first generic images of ladies of ill repute were created in that very city in the 1490s. By the early sixteenth century, it is again Venice where the sea change in the social perception of females aspiring to be the discerning companions of clerics and men of humanist bent can be best observed. The common prostitute metamorphoses into the *cortigiana onesta*. We saw that Titian had specialized in portraits of such females, many of them anonymous⁽⁵⁹⁾.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ See above, note 7. The system of marking non-believers by color was developed in the Islamic realm in the seventh century - yellow for Jews, blue for Christians - and adopted for the former by the Lateran Council of 1215. The longevity of the observance is documented by a manuscript illumination of the fifteenth century in the Bibliothèque Nationale: A birds-eye view of Jerusalem shows a Christian pilgrim in blue, accompanied by a native guide with a white turban, approaching the city and, closer to it, a long-robed Jew with a pointed yellow hat, see *Ignatius von Loyola und die Gesellschaft Jesu: 1491-1556*, A. Falkner and P. Imhof (eds.) (Würzburg, 1990) p. 69.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ See e.g. the essays in the exhibition catalogue *Art and Love* (see n. 1), specifically L. SYSON's rich contribution: *'Belle:' Picturing Beautiful Women*, pp. 246-254. The multiple allusions played upon in such pictures are shown "to operate on several levels", yet there is no awareness of the tell-tale scarves tucked into the décolletés of these beauties which must have added extra piquancy for the contemporary beholder. The entry for cat. no. 146b, a 'bella' by Palma Vecchio in Vienna (of ca. 1512-1514), remarks on her inviting *déshabillé* and averted eyes - both well-known trademarks of the genre - however fails to notice the scarf and the significance of her robe's color combination: green and orange, the symbols of love and shame; cf., the passage from Aretino's *Dialoghi* cited above, n.16. The young woman has also opened a sewing box, a thread dangling from it. Again, Aretino is enlightening. Nanna instructs Pippa how to best attract lovers: Never waste time, Pippa: tidy up the house, sew a few stiches for the sake of appearances ... (Non perder mai tempo, Pippa: vâ per casa, ficca due punti per un bel parere ...). Often, insight into the meaning

'Historical' meretrices

Our demonstration of whom Leonardo's painting does not represent, necessarily requires an attempt to establish who the woman could be, or what the image meant to the artist and his contemporaries. A glance at the 1496 Strasbourg edition of the *Eunuchus* by Terence, embellished by a colored woodcut of the prostitute Thais, is revealing (Fig. 4). She sports a yellow ribbon-like shawl and dress worn over a red undergarment. This color combination makes a statement of the utmost clarity and it is found in a number of female 'portraits' of the time. We mentioned already Holbein's *Lais corinthiaca* of 1526 (Fig. 5), one of the most highly paid courtesans of antiquity known to the humanists and an educated public at least since the text of Athenaeus was first published as an Aldina by the Cretan scholar Marcus Musurus in Venice in 1514⁽⁶⁰⁾. Her red slashed silken dress is furnished with opulent yellow sleeves. Both ladies, one an 'historical' figure, the other from myth, are dressed as modern courtesans⁽⁶¹⁾.

In view of the assembled evidence the conclusion seems inescapable: the *Gioconda* was meant to be seen as the supreme and therefore nameless member of that age-old sisterhood. Though the artist never tired of perfecting her, he did not finish the painting. No document exists to prove that the sitter was Lisa del Giocondo. We need look back at Vasari's account of the

of minor details - mostly not noticed by the casual viewer - is garnered in a more rewarding fashion from anti-Petrarchan writings than from the over-abundant neo-Petrarchan texts.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Cf. *Hans Holbein the Younger* (see n. 10) cat. no. 114, fig.: p. 357.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Holbein travelled to France in 1524; by that time the *Gioconda* was at Fontainebleau and the painter might have seen her there. Interestingly, his *Lais* has a slightly later counterpart, a studio piece, with *Venus and Amor* - both women are dressed alike: *Hans Holbein* (see n. 10) nos. 114 f. pp. 356-361; no mention is made of the significance of their outfit in the text although late sixteenth century sources are quoted which saw local Basel prostitutes in them.

creation of the portrait of a lady of that name. Following Vasari, it is generally assumed that Leonardo – returning from Milan to his native town in 1500 – began work on the *Gioconda* in 1503⁽⁶²⁾. In the absence of documents to support the tacit assumption that the *Gioconda* and a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo are one and the same painting, nothing prevents us from supposing that the painter brought the *Gioconda* with him from Milan, perhaps in its early stages. We have seen that the liberal atmosphere of Ludovico il Moro's court encouraged audacious projects. Although none of the variants of the Monna Vanna and the nude *Gioconda*, probably done after a lost painting by the master himself, can be dated with certainty, it is entirely possible that the concept of having two versions of the same woman – one nude and one fully attired – was floated at the Milanese court. Goya's two *Majas* in the Prado are late examples of the genre. It is noteworthy that these oblong paintings were conceived as *sopraporte*. The attired *Maja* – who wears an alluringly opened bolero with bright yellow sleeves, the trade mark of *majas*, that is young women of easy mores – followed the nude one with some delay⁽⁶³⁾.

⁽⁶²⁾ See *Le vite de' piú eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, volume terzo, P. DELLA PERGOLA / L. GRASSI et al. (eds.) (Milan, 1953) pp. 402f.; the text is that of the 1568 edition. For observations on the concept of Vasari's *Lives* and their dependability, see A.B. BARRIAULT / A. LADIS ET AL., *Reading Vasari* (London, 2005), specifically P. BAROLSKY, *Fear of Fiction: the Fun of Reading Vasari*, pp. 31-35.

⁽⁶³⁾ The *Majas* were painted between about 1798 and 1805. The nude is first mentioned in 1800 in the possession of Manuel de Godoy, Prime Minister of Spain under Charles IV, and the dressed one in 1808, also with Godoy. In 1814, the sixty-nine year old Goya was called before the Inquisition to explain himself about the painting's intent: his response is not preserved. In the document, the second painting is specified as "a woman dressed as a *maja*," the first time this expression is used. The etymology of the word is not clear, but its connotation is highly erotic.

New Evidence: The Heidelberg Incunable

We believe that this assumption is corroborated by a spectacular recent discovery. In 1703 the University Library at Heidelberg acquired an incunable of Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*, printed in Bologna in 1477 (D 7620 qt. Inc.; H 5180; ISTC ic00517400) that once belonged to Agostino Vespucci. A colleague and confidant of Niccolò Machiavelli, he worked under him in the second chancery of the Florentine Republic of which Machiavelli was in charge since June 1498. The book has numerous handwritten comments by its learned owner. Of exceptional interest is a note in the margin of a passage in letter 1.9.15, written in December 54 B.C. Cicero addresses his friend Publius Cornelius Lentulus Spinther and bemoans the weak support he, Cicero – who refers to his own person as *caput* – had received from many of his colleagues in the Senate. In an ironic comment he likens their exclusive concern for the well-being of his head and not his entire body, to the unfinished state in which the famous artist Apelles had left a painting of Venus: *Nunc, ut Apelles Veneris caput et summa pectoris politissima arte perfecit, reliquam partem corporis incohatam reliquit, sic quidam homines ...* (Just as Apelles completed with the most refined art the head and shoulders of his Venus while he left the rest of her body begun but not finished, so certain people have confined their good offices to my head alone, and have left the rest of me incomplete and only rough-hewn). Vespucci's comment to this passage runs (fol. 11r*): *Apelles pictor. Ita Leonardus Vinci facit in omnibus suis picturis, ut enim caput Lise del Giocondo et Anne matris virginis. Videbimus, quid faciet de aula magni consilii, de qua re convenit iam cum vexillifero. 1503 Octobris* (The painter Apelles. So does Leonardo da Vinci in all of his paintings, for example the head of Lisa del Giocondo and Anne, the mother of the Virgin. We shall see what he will do in the hall of the Great Council about which he reached an agreement with the gon-

faloniere [the highest magistrate]. October 1503 – abbreviations resolved by Probst)⁽⁶⁴⁾.

Vespucchi's precious note confirms that Leonardo, again in Florence since 1500, but often absent from the city while serving the republic in the war with Pisa or Cesare Borgia during the campaigns on behalf of Cesare's father, Pope Alexander VI, between 1502-03, had indeed begun a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo. He also had prepared a cartoon for a St. Anne – probably for the Ss. Annunziata, the church of the Servites in whose monastery Leonardo lived initially – and he was planning a huge wallpainting of the Battle of Anghiari, won by Florence over Milan in 1440, for the great hall in the Palazzo Vecchio. Vespucchi's comment also attests to a widespread awareness of the painter's habit of leaving work unfinished. As discussed above, Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua, was one of the victims

⁽⁶⁴⁾ The context was first established by A. SCHLECHTER, *Die edel kunst der truckerey: Ausgewählte Inkunabeln der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg*, exhibition catalogue (Heidelberg, 2005) no. 20, pp. 28f. See now the perceptive study of the library's director Veit Probst, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Mona Lisa: Leonardo da Vinci trifft Niccolò Machiavelli und Agostino Vespucci*, electronically available:

<http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2008/410>

(January 2008); now available in print under the same title (Verlag Regionalkultur, Heidelberg, 2008). This rich work does not only throw much new light on the history of the period and the protagonists but also on the present state of the Monna Lisa research. Both Schlechter and Probst take the identity of the Gioconda in Paris and a hardly begun portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo, for granted, as do the majority of Leonardo scholars. However, on page 42 of his study, Probst admits the possibility, that the Gioconda and the portrait of Lisa might be two different paintings, the latter having gone lost, but he immediately dismisses the idea as highly unlikely. I am most grateful to Veit Probst for generously transmitting his study and to Dorothee Mussnug for alerting me to its imminent electronic publication. See also the critical review of Probst's conclusion by R. Zapperi, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", Wednesday, 11 June, 2008, No. 134, P. N 3; also Frank Zöllner, "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", 30 June, 2008, p. 40. For the Latin text and the translation: *Cicero. The Letters to his Friends*, vol. I, With an English Translation by W. Glynn Williams (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

of that tendency; her portrait was never undertaken (cf. Fig. 22) and, likewise, Leonardo's Florentine projects – among them a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo – were never completed.

I firmly believe that this portrait, hardly begun and apparently never finished, may have been seen by or was described to Vasari before he published his *Lives* in 1550. This would explain the irreconcilable differences between the features he emphasizes which, however, do not correspond to those of the extant *Gioconda*, a work Vasari never inspected personally. He only enthuses about Lisa's head and bosom and there is no mention of the sitter's apparel or position nor of the spectacular background landscape. Vasari's description seems rather to reflect the state of Lisa's portrait in Vespucci's note. The authority of the *Lives* forever established the false identification of the Paris *Gioconda* with the portrait of Lisa del Giocondo.

Above, we discussed the likelihood of the *Gioconda* and her nude variant being products of Leonardo's Milanese period which ended in 1499. As we noted already, the impact of the *Gioconda* on young Raphael and other Florentine artists has often been stressed. It seems hardly possible that Leonardo first began this painting in the restless years he spent in his native city between 1500 and 1506, or better between October 1503 and 1506, since Vespucci certainly would have included the picture in his comment if Leonardo had worked on it at the time. The inevitable conclusion must be drawn: an unfinished and lost portrait of Lisa del Giocondo and the *Gioconda* in Paris are two different works; the latter – though still incomplete – was there in its essential details and was imitated while with Leonardo in Florence. One might add that the portrait of a Florentine housewife would hardly have been copied more than sixty times. It was rather the immense appeal of the supreme eroticism the *Gioconda* manifests that made her a desirable object for collectors over time.

Once we accept that the *Gioconda* and a portrait of Lisa del

Giocondo are not identical, many of the open questions surrounding the painting that Cécile Scailliérez has summarized so well, can be considered solved⁽⁶⁵⁾. At this point we may ask whether Leonardo – who visited Venice in 1500 before returning to Florence – had taken note of the teeming and ever freshly regimented street scene in the Republic, so different from the Milanese court where he had worked with short breaks from 1481-1499 and would again, now under French administration, from 1506/08-1513. The Philadelphia image of a woman we have identified as a generic ‘portrait’ of a Venitian prostitute, is shown in a dark dress (Fig. 2). Her yellow shawl is highlighted and the inscription on the back evokes the classical *topoi*: Satisfy the Soul with Delights for after Death there is no Pleasure. For Leonardo’s choice of colors for the outfit of the *Gioconda*, we turn again to the modest woodcut of Thais (Fig. 4). There, red and yellow, the colors of lust and shame had been used as the clue for a type, the Venetian streetwalker. Ever more luxurious styles, introduced around the first decade of the sixteenth century, were eagerly adopted by the Venetian courtesans as mirrored in the innumerable images of *Belle*. More alluring elements such as revealing the breasts, loose (or false) hair were added to the color coding of the garments. However opulent in cut and richer in the choice of hues, the classic combination of red and yellow or green and yellow is much in evidence. What is also present but goes unrecognized, is the fine scarf with yellow stripes, almost hidden in the coiffure and coming down on the *décolleté*.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ The nineteenth century saw a *femme fatale* in her, see G. BOAS, *The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste*, “Journal of the History of Ideas”, 1 (1940) pp. 207-224. MARANI (2003, see n. 23) pp. 15-21. Stephen Bann (2005), speaking on “Reproducing the Mona Lisa in Nineteenth Century France”, stressed the impact of the French translation of Vasari’s *Lives* in 1841 and Théophile Gautier’s description of the painting of 1857, also of the role of new reproductive technologies for the wide dissemination of the image. With psychology serving as an important tool, none of the interpretations have adequately attempted to analyze the visual cues offered by Leonardo.



Fig. 25 – Albrecht Dürer, *Drawing of a Venetian woman*.
Albertina, Vienna

There is, however, yet another aspect worth exploring. Leonardo's sublime rendering of an anonymous beauty subtly combines two strands: the humanists' perception of the classical *topoi*, as elaborated by Catullus, Horace and Ovid, that stressed the physical defects of prostitutes – the Gioconda's wart – with the color code derived from Revelation, that is the red and gold attire of the Whore of Babylon and the attire of the Venetian *gioconde*. A drawing and a woodcut by Dürer may serve as proof (Fig. 25 and Fig. 26)⁽⁶⁶⁾. This juxtaposition of antique and Christian traditions is perfectly in tune with the attitude of Leonardo's literate contemporaries. The sophistication of the painting's concept and the perfection of its execution had no equal and may have made the 'decoding' of this masterpiece so difficult. It must have acquired iconic status for Leonardo himself since he clearly attempted to demonstrate the essence of the *paragone*, a notion central to his work: the superiority of paint-

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Dürer's visits in Venice in 1494/5 coincided with this development. On a detailed drawing of a Venetian women – our Fig. 25 – (F. WINKLER, *Die Zeichnungen Albrecht Dürers* [Berlin, 1936-39] vol. I, no. 69, Vienna, Albertina). Dürer does not indicate the colors of the garb, however, that he endowed the Whore of Babylon - our Fig. 26 - (Rev.17, 1-2; 4; 5-6), riding the Seven-headed Beast with the same costume for his Apocalypse (1497/ 1498) suggest that its connotation was negative and his drawings may represent a courtesan, see K.-A. KNAPPE, *Dürer: Das graphische Werk* (Vienna / Munich, 1964) p. 181. I would suggest that the description of the "Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (Rev. 17, 4-6): "the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color and decked with gold and precious stones," must be at the root of the iconography of prostitutes. It merged with yellow, the age-old color of shame. That the Renaissance followed Roman authors in assigning red to Venus, the classical counterpart of the Apocalyptic Woman, is no surprise. When shown in the nude - her standard costume - the goddess of love rests on red sheets embellished with gold, see e.g., the Sleeping Venus by Giorgione and Titian in Dresden, 185, ca. 1508-10, and Palma Vecchios rendering of the subject, *ibid.* 190, ca. 1518-20 - he provides his Venus with the the obligatory courtesan coiffure (cf. n.16); most of Titian's *Veneres* follow suite.



Fig. 26 – Albrecht Dürer, *Woodcut from the Apocalypse*,
Apocalyptic Woman.

ing over poetry and sculpture⁽⁶⁷⁾. The painting stands at the beginning of a long line of portraits of *belle donne*. We noticed earlier that, by extension, the color coding of the garments of widely known biblical prostitutes, such as Salome, the Woman from Samaria and Mary Magdalen was utilized for their depictions. Furthermore, notorious females from history or mythology – Lais, Thais, Cleopatra and Flora – were dressed in the colors of lust and shame⁽⁶⁸⁾.

Whom does Leonardo's Gioconda represent?

At this juncture, one question poses itself inevitably: what did the painting he cherished so greatly mean to Leonardo himself? We shall venture an answer. When perusing the *Libro di Pittura* it is evident throughout that Leonardo, the artist, scientist, thinker and teacher is perfectly familiar with the ongoing theoretical discourse on the character, implications and the ethics of artistic activity, an exercise nourished by the rediscovery of relevant texts by the humanists since Petrarch's time and

⁽⁶⁷⁾ For Leonardo's crucial discussion of the *paragone* see C. PEDRETTI / C. VECCE, *Il libro di pittura* (see n. 30) chapter 25, pp. 149f.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ See the pathbreaking study by J. HELD, *Flora, Goddess, and Courtesan*, "De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honour of Erwin Panofsky", M. Meiss (ed.) (New York, 1961) pp. 201-218, specifically p. 216. He singles out Boccaccio's influential tale of Flora that inspired paintings such as Titian's girl in negligé offering flowers to the viewer in the Uffizi, see Bellini, Giorgione, Titian (see n.1) cat. no. 42. For text and sources see *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, V. Branca (ed.) vol. X, V. Zaccaria (ed.) (Milan, 1967; 1970) pp. 256-261 and 525f.; for an English translation see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, V. Brown, ed. and transl. (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Cambridge, Mass. / London, 2001) LXIV: *De Flora meretrice dea florum et Cephiri coniuge*, pp. 264-267. Boccaccio drew on classical and patristic sources when describing the lascivious theatrical performances, *ludi florales*, celebrated in honor of the goddess Flora. I am preparing a study on representations of classical and biblical heroines from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

elaborated by Ghiberti and Alberti, to mention a few⁽⁶⁹⁾. Among the frequently discussed artists' anecdotes from antiquity is that of the celebrated Greek painter Zeuxis. Charged with the task of painting Helen, the glory of women, for the temple of Juno at Croton, he asked to be shown the most beautiful girls and boys of the city. Out of them he chose five. He then composed an ideal picture of Helen from drawings he had made of their most attractive body parts⁽⁷⁰⁾.

Now, this story is retold and elaborated in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (On Famous Women) written in 1361-1362 as part of his chapter 37 that is devoted to *De Helena Menelai regis coniuge* (Helen, wife of King Menelaus)⁽⁷¹⁾. Innovative and most influential, Boccaccio's book presents – according to his own statement – both good and bad women, the latter to contrast their deeds with those who led glorious and decent lives in order

⁽⁶⁹⁾ See the study of JULIAN KLIEMANN, *Die VIRTUS des Zeuxis*, “Die Virtus des Künstlers in der itlienischen Renaissance”, J. Poeschke / Th. Weigel et al.(eds.) (Münster, 2006) pp. 197-229, with references.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ The sources: CICERO, *De Inventione* 2. 1-3; PLINY, *Naturalis historia* 35.64; see PAULY-WISSOWA, *Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. 15 (Munich, 1978) cols. 1481-1488, s.v. Zeuxis 1, in particular 1484, 11 (K. Gschwantler).

⁽⁷¹⁾ GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Famous Women* (see n. 68) pp. 142-151. Translations are taken from this work, the first: 37.1, p. 153; the next: 37.5, pp. 143, 145; the last: 37.6, p. 145. It was Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* that inspired Boccaccio to write on the lives of women. Before his demise in 1375 he copied out the final redaction (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS. Laur. 90 sup. 981¹ [Gaddi 593]). The success of the book was immediate - more than a hundred manuscripts survive - and translations into Italian were instant, slightly later, French, German, English and Spanish renderings followed. The Latin text was first printed in Ulm in 1473 (H 3329; ISTC); see the Introductions by V. Zaccaria, pp. 13f.; Text pp. 147-153 and 510, for the sources. Also V. BROWN (see n. 68) pp. XI-XXV. Boccaccio was instrumental in bringing about the verbum verbo translation of both *Iliad* and *Odysee* by the Calabrian monk Leontius Pilatus between 1358 and 1362. Homer's epics were thus accessible to Leonardo.

to encourage the pursuit of virtue. The first sentence of the chapter sets the tone: *Helena tam ob suam lasciviam – ut multis visum est – quam ob diuturnum bellum ex ea consecutum toto orbi notissima femina ...* (The view is widely held that Helen was notorious throughout the entire world as much for her lustfulness as for the long war which resulted from it). Her abduction by Theseus, her elopement with Paris, her union with Deiphobus – another of Priam’s many sons – after the death of Paris and her return to Menelaus after the destruction of Troy show her an unrelenting sinner. Yet, Boccaccio’s praise of Helen’s divine beauty is meant to arouse and it did inspire Leonardo. Boccaccio continues: “The happiness in Helen’s eyes, the pleasant serenity of her entire face, her heavenly laugh, and the charming changes of expression reflecting what she heard and saw – who would represent these with a painter’s brush or a sculptor’s chisel? That is the prerogative of nature alone.” Leonardo faced the challenge and certainly felt that he had surpassed Zeuxis as well as nature in his *Gioconda* / *Helena*. Boccaccio continues: “...the marvelous whiteness of her complexion; her mass of golden hair falling and swirling on her shoulders in saucy curls; ... certain movements of her scented and rosy mouth; her dazzling forehead and ivory throat rising above the hidden delights of her breast that were imaginable only from the rhythm of her breathing”.

Leonardo presents the lascivious queen in the generic garb of a courtesan. He places her high on a lookout as Homer has her on the walls of Troy to see the slaughter she had caused and to be seen and praised by friends and foe alike for her unearthly beauty ⁽⁷²⁾. There is no battle-ground, just the majestic land-

⁽⁷²⁾ See HOMER, *Iliad* 3.121-244. The Latin prose translation of *Iliad* 1-16 by Lorenzo Valla (1443) and 17-24 by his student Franciscus Griffolinus Aretinus (ca. 1457) was first printed in Brescia in 1474 (H 8774; ISTC: Homerus) and reprinted also in Brescia in 1497 (H 8775; ISTC: Homerus;

scape. The painter surely convinced himself of having won the contest with nature framed in Boccaccio's rhetorical question. His is not the portrait of a human being but of a creature who "possessed beauty from some divine source"⁽⁷³⁾.

In an important article Elizabeth Cropper has drawn attention to the sea change in the perception of art first explored in dialogues such as Lodovico Dolce's *Aretino* about the middle of the sixteenth century. Inspired by the supreme eroticism of Titian's "lyrical painting," it is the "gendered beholder," who desires to possess the object of his passion with the work of art. He thus eclipses the concept of the traditional customers, the church and the princely courts. With the increased demand for images of *belle* or mythological paintings, *poesie*, by male con-

information supplied by G. N. Knauer). Many copies of both incunabula are still extant (see ISTC). The dramatic teichoscopy, the 'viewing from the wall', hinted at only briefly by Boccaccio, is one of the most compelling scenes of the Iliad. The elderly principes of Troy sit around Priam on the wall to watch the battlefield when Helena approaches (edition of 1474, fol. [C 5]r): (Il. 3.149-158) "Sedebant autem circa Priamum quos dixi [scil. Valla] principes, et inter se colloquebantur in alta turri . . . (154) hi vero vadentem Helenam in turrin conspexerunt. Alius ad alium suppressa voce dicebant: Profecto non indignum est Troianos Graecosque tot mala tanto temporis spatio sustinere ob hanc faciem quae prorsus non humana, sed immortalis cuiusdam deae videtur. Ceterum etsi tam divina specie mulier est "(Seated around Priam upon a high tower where the elders [whom I, i.e., Valla, just mentioned], talking to each other... They perceived Helen coming to the tower, and they remarked, with lowered voice, among themselves: verily, it is not an unworthy fight the Trojans and Greeks fought over such a long time for t h a t face; it seems certainly not that of a human being but that of some immortal goddess). It is not known whether Leonardo had access to Valla's translation which might have been available in the humanist circles in Milan. - Nicolaus de Valle's († 1473) unfinished Latin hexameter translation of the Iliad was published by Theodorus Gaza in Rome also in 1474 (HC 8780; see ISTC); the passage in question, lines 169-176 in de Valle's (unnumbered) translation differs (fol. [a 7]r*). No other translation of the Iliad was available in print about 1500. Angelo Poliziano's (1454-1494) hexameter translation of Il. 2-3 (1472) was first published in 1839 in Rome.

⁽⁷³⁾ *De mulieribus claris*, 37.6.

sumers who evince connoisseurship, the market changes dramatically⁽⁷⁴⁾. It is worth recalling that an earlier testimony to this phenomenon does not come from the pen of a writer but of a painter. It is, of course, Leonardo's often cited 'reminiscence' in the *Libro di Pittura*: "And if the poet claims that he can inflame men to love ... the painter has the power to do the same, and indeed more so, for he places before the lover's eyes the very image of the beloved object, and he often engages with it, kissing it, and speaking with it; which he would not do were the same beauties placed before him by the writer; and so much more [does painting] conquer the minds of men, to love and fall in love with [a] painting that does not portray any living woman. And once it happened to me that I made a painting which represented a sacred subject, which was bought by one who loved it, and he wanted me to remove the symbols of divinity, so that he could kiss it without impropriety. But, in the end, his conscience overcame his sighs and his physical passion, and he had to remove it from his house"⁽⁷⁵⁾. Leonardo knew no such qualms; he created the *Gioconda*, he adored her and lived with her almost to the end of his life, when he appears to finally have entrusted it to his beloved Salai.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ "The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art, Place and Displacement in the Renaissance, A. Vos (ed.) (Binghamton, N.Y., 1995) pp. 159-205, the quotes: p. 198 and 202.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ The translation is taken from L. Syson (see n. 59) p. 254, n. 47. For the Italian text: *Il Libro di Pittura* (see n. 30) p. 149 [25]: cf. PEDRETTI, *ibid.* p. 150, note to [25]: "Per il riferimento alla pornografia e relative implicazioni autobiografiche, v. Introduzione p. 17, nota 5." The reference is illuminating, however, the numbers of the notes on p. 17 were left out. See also Pedretti, *Quella puttana di Leonardo*, (see n. 16). Even the somewhat pedestrian Giovio (1483-1552) eloquently describes the revolutionary turn brought about by Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo – "risen suddenly from the shadows of that age," see T. C. PRICE ZIMMERMANN, *Paolo Giovio and the Evolution of Renaissance Art Criticism*, Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance. Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller, C.H. Clough (ed.) (Manchester, 1976) pp. 406-424; and VILLATA (see n. 40) document 338, pp. 292-294.

Leonardo and Giuliano de' Medici

As mentioned, Leonardo went to Rome in 1513, residing in the Belvedere at the Vatican. His friend and host was Giuliano de' Medici, son of Lorenzo il Magnifico and brother of Pope Leo X. According to the literary 'portrait' presented of Giuliano in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* – written between 1508 and 1518 – Giuliano was a very gallant partisan of the fair sex⁽⁷⁶⁾. Giuliano's portrait in the Metropolitan Museum is considered the finest among a number of extant versions done after Raphael, possibly under the supervision of the master himself (Fig. 27). Placed against a drawn green curtain that reveals Castel Sant'Angelo in the background, indicating his function as *Capitano generale della Chiesa*, the sitter – dressed in a splendid *houppelande* – is located in the *piano nobile* of a palace, clearly the Vatican. The document in his hand may contain the papal appointment to that position. Unsurprisingly, his posture is reminiscent of the *Gioconda*, a conceit appropriated early and much used by Raphael. Giuliano died young of consumption on 17 March 1516 in Fiesole, about one year after his lavishly celebrated wedding to Filiberta of Savoy at Turin in 1515. Somewhat later, the title Dukes of Nemours was conferred upon the couple⁽⁷⁷⁾.

(76) See e.g., BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE, *Il libro del cortegiano* W. Barberis (ed.) (Turin, 1998) book 3. Giuliano was a man of letters rather than of war, for which he was ill prepared. He had no legitimate offspring; in 1511 a son, Ippolito, was born to him by Pacifica Brandano in Urbino (for him see "Ippolito de' Medici und Giulia Gonzaga," WALTER / ZAPPERI [see n. 4] pp. 59-74). Giuliano reportedly indulged in sexual excesses in Florence in 1514. For a review of the sources on Giuliano's life see G. Pieraccini, *La stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo. Saggio di ricerche sulla trasmissione ereditaria dei caratteri biologici*, Vol. I (Florence: Nardini Editore, 1986) pp. 215-230 and fig. 41, portrait by Allori after Raphael, on neutral background, in the Uffizi). For other copies, including the Metropolitan's (whom the author ascribes to Raphael's collaborator Penni) see F. DE' MAFFEI, *Il Ritratto di Giuliano, Fratello di Leone X, Dipinto da Raffaello*, "L'Arte 50", (1959) pp. 309-324.

(77) For the portrait in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (49.712)



Fig. 27 – After Raphael, *Portrait of Giuliano de' Medici*.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The close rapport of Leonardo with Giuliano suggests that the topic of courtesans and their images may have been discussed frequently. Not only was the *Gioconda* available in the artist's studio at the Belvedere, but presumably also versions of the Monna Vanna and the nude *Gioconda*, either copies by his quirky *garzone* Salai or by the master himself. Though known only from a later ordinance by the austere Clement VIII that forced the Roman courtesans to wear long yellow sleeves, it seems not unlikely that the pope only renewed earlier decrees to this effect. The visual evidence presented in our investigation confirms that Clement's sanction must have had precedents⁽⁷⁸⁾. We noted that the luxurious, richly highlighted saffron-colored silk sleeves of the *Gioconda* stand out in style and execution from

see J. SHEARMAN, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources* (1483-1602) vol. I (New Haven / London, 2003) p. 220; the fragmentary date R.S.M. ...V, is to be read either as MDXIV or MDXV, more likely the latter because Giuliano was made Captain General of the Church on 29 June 1515. The fortress received bastions under Nicholas V (1447-1455) which were added on to under Alexander VI (1492-1503) by Antonio da Sangallo; a fourth tower ("torre dei Borgia") was then added to shelter the bridge. The monument is shown before the drastic remodeling under Paul III, including the passetto, the famous escape route connecting the castle with the Vatican. The portrait was probably begun before the sitter left Rome on 5 July 1515. During their brief residence in Rome, Giuliano and Filiberta stayed at the Palazzo Orsini (now Palazzo Taverna) on Monte Giordano. See D. LAURENZA, *Leonardo nella Roma di Leone X [c. 1513-16]: Gli studi anatomici, la vita, l'arte, etc.*, XLIII *Lettura Vinciana*, 12 aprile 2003 (Citta di Vinci, 2004), specifically pp. 25f. The study adduces documents that confirm the mutual influences between Leonardo and Raphael. I would like to thank warmly Katharine Baetjer for granting permission to publish the painting in the Metropolitan Museum.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ As attested by Piero di Cosimo's (1462-1521) Magdalen who displays one long yellow sleeve, Rome, Palazzo Barberini, no. 1468, incorrectly described by D. Geronimus (see n. 16) p. 182 and pl. 141. For Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592-1605) see L. VON PASTOR, *Geschichte der Päpste seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters*, vol. XI (Freiburg, Breisgau, 1927, reprint Freiburg / Rome, 1959) pp. 620f. with note 4, for the *editti* and *avvisi* of the pope, beginning in 1592. In 1585, Sixtus V expelled the Roman prostitutes from the Borgo – the 'cleansing' was shortlived, see von Pastor, vol. X, p. 72.

the rest of the painting. Foreshadowing *alla prima* technique, they look like a reworking done during Leonardo's presence in Rome between 1513 and 1516. Papal decrees prescribed for the local *demi-monde* may have inspired the change.

It is worth remembering that Leonardo arrived in Rome when Raphael was at the height of his career. As discussed above, besides the *Gioconda*, Raphael must have been aware of the various avatars of the Monna Vanna and the nude *Gioconda*. It is hard to imagine that without this visual stimulus Raphael would have created his own renderings: the *Donna Velata* and the *Fornarina*. Raphael had bought a house in the Borgo and both painters worked in close proximity at the Vatican for a number of years⁽⁷⁹⁾.

After the demise of his host and patron Giuliano de' Medici, Leonardo accepted an invitation by François I to settle at the manor of Cloux in the vicinity of Amboise in 1516 as a highly remunerated and respected member of the court. His disciples Francesco Melzi and Salai accompanied him. He is known to have shown some of his works to occasional callers, Antonio de Beatis' travel journal records the visit of his master, Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona (1474-1519)⁽⁸⁰⁾. The Cardinal interrupted his

⁽⁷⁹⁾ In a malicious letter of 2 July 1518 by Sebastiano del Piombo to Michelangelo, the writer describes how Raphael had adapted his color-style to Leonardo's in two paintings he sent to the court in Fontainebleau: "... pareno figure che siano state al fumo, o vero figure di ferro che luceno, tutte chiare e tutte nere, e desegnate al modo ve dirà Leonardo". Cf. J. SHEARMAN (see n. 77), pp. 352f. The impact of Monna Lisa and Monna Vanna on the *Donna Velata* and the *Fornarina* as ideals of female beauty is noted by J. K. NELSON, *XLVI Lettura Vinciana*, 22 aprile 2006, p. 14, however, I disagree with his statement concerning the *Donna Velata* "..., ove la prima figura incarna le virtù matrimoniali, la seconda una qualità erotica."

⁽⁸⁰⁾ A royal bastard, he was made a cardinal by Alexander VI. Suspect of a rebellion under Leo X in 1517, he undertook his trip to disappear from view and seek support of the young emperor Charles V, also to visit European courts to make himself better known. He cut a dashing figure – cardinals were not required to take higher orders till late in their careers – and appears to have

grand tour through Europe at Cloux on 10 October 1517, to enjoy the privilege of seeing some paintings: a Virgin with Child and Sainte Anne, a John the Baptist and the portrait of “a certain Florentine lady done from nature at the behest of the late Giuliano de Medici, the Magnificent.” Antonio added her name in the margin of his manuscript the next day: “S.ra Isabella Gualanda,” apparently a mistress of Giuliano. However, no such painting seems to have survived, unless one assumes an identity with a nude *Gioconda*. Giuliano’s disposition certainly permits such an hypothesis. In Blois the visitors saw another portrait of a “certain Lady from Lombardy,” also by Leonardo, in the Royal collection since 1517 and identified with the so-called *Belle Ferronnière* in the Louvre. It has been surmised, but it seems unlikely that the visitors saw the *Gioconda* in Cloux. Recent research makes it likely that Salai, Leonardo’s favorite – who had returned to Milan and was the owner of paintings by the master – sold several of them to the French crown at an enormous sum already in 1518⁽⁸¹⁾. Vasari, perhaps through his contacts with

fathered the famed courtesan Tullia d’Aragona, see above, note 17. For De Beatis see *The Travel Journal of Antonio De’ Beatis. Germany, Switzerland, The Low Countries and Italy, 1517-1518*, J.R. Hale / J.M.A. Lindon (ed. and translators) (London, 1979), and the informative paraphrase of ANDRÉ CHASTEL, *Le cardinal Louis d’Aragon, un voyageur princier de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1986); also L.Pastor who discovered the manuscripts of the travel report: *Die Reise des Kardinals Luigi d’Aragona durch Deutschland, die Niederlande, Frankreich und Oberitalien 1517-1518, beschrieben von Antonio de Beatis* (Freiburg, 1905), the biography of Luigi on pp. 1-9.

⁽⁸¹⁾ For the relevant documents of 1518 and 1525 see B. JESTAZ, *François Ier, Salai et les tableaux de Léonard de Vinci*, “Revue de l’Art, 126, 4”, pp. 68-72; VILLATA (see n. 40), documents 333 and 333b, pp. 236-289; also SCAILLIÉREZ (see n. 21) pp. 23-26, MARANI (see n. 23) pp. 23-25, and 44-45, also GREENSTEIN (see n. 31) pp. 17-21. Salai appears to have produced copies of the paintings before the sale, among them apparently of the *Gioconda*; in 1525 an inventory – of which two copies exist – made of twelve paintings he owned at the time of his death in 1523 confirms that the term *Gioconda* was current in Leonardo’s circle, cf. above, n. 32. In Leonardo’s own will drawn up in 1518 (VILLATA, doc-

artists who had been occupied at Fontainebleau and returned to Florence, knew of the painting's presence in the royal collection when he first published his *Lives* in 1550. His famous description of the "Monna Lisa" was written before the death of François I in 1547. We saw, however, that he confounds the *Gioconda* with a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo – hardly the only instance of error in Vasari.

With the painting in the Royal collection at Fontainebleau and reported on quite frequently, a study on the impact of one specific feature on French art in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remains to be published: the *Gioconda*'s yellow shawl. It is the subject of a separate study I have undertaken. What is truly astonishing is the persistence of artistic conceits – foremost the yellow shawl – that characterize illegal unions and an illicit life style and yet glorify them. When integrated into collective memory and perception, such concepts escape us moderns and have to be retrieved. The process was circuitous but the results may justify the effort. As a by-product of this quest for a reliable visual vocabulary that defines a specific social stratum, the *Gioconda* may have been unveiled and thus found her place.

Acknowledgments

I have received much help and enlightenment during my work and I am very grateful for it.

Cécile Scailliérez graciously accorded access to the *Gioconda* at the Louvre on a closing day; the visit was facilitated by Martine Denoyelle's kind intervention. Ralph Rosen provide an over life-size poster of the *Gioconda* and several shots of cour-

uments 322 and 323, pp. 275-278) no paintings are mentioned; they must have gone with Salai who sold them. Unfortunately, the document attesting to the sale in 1518 does not specify their subjects.

tesans from museum visits. This article was read – and it greatly benefited in the process – by Joseph Connors, Rudolf Kassel, Walter Ludwig, Helen North and Joan Mertens to whose sense of style it is much indebted. I am deeply beholden to them all, as well as to Pietro Marani for accepting it for the *Raccolta Vinciana* and to James O'Donnell for connecting Milan with Philadelphia.

